

ANC

MANHUNT

DETECTIVE STORY MONTHLY

**EVERY
STORY
NEW!**

I Don't Fool Around
by **Charles
Jackson**
author of
The Lost Weekend

**AUGUST
35 CENTS**

A Complete Novel by **CHARLES WILLIAMS**



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Identity Unknown

It looked like a tough case to Det.-Sgt. Emory. There was nothing to work with but an empty room, and a corpse without a name . . .

BY JONATHAN CRAIG

THE cheap furnished room in the brownstone where the girl had been murdered was so cramped that it was hard for Walt and the assistant M.E. and me to keep out of each

other's way. The photographer and the other techs had finished half an hour ago and gone back to the station house. I'd put a patrolman at either end of the third-floor corridor to keep the crowd back. From the noise that came up both the front and back stairs, it seemed that

half of New York's west side must be down there.

The building super was talking to the two ambulance attendants in the hallway just outside the door. He was beginning to rub on my nerves. The M.E. had stripped the girl, of course, and the super was trying his damndest to get a clear gander at her.

"Relax, Jacobson," I told him. "You've seen young girls before. Wait for us down the hall."

He gave me a hard look, but he moved away.

The M.E. pulled the sheet up over the girl's body. "That's it," he said.

I motioned for the ambulance attendants to take her away. When the body was gone, and I'd shut the door, the M.E. sat down on the side of the bed and lit a cigar.

"She had a lot of living left to her," he said. "She was about eighteen, I'd say. No older." He shook his head. "Damn shame."

"You find anything besides those lumps on her jaw?" I asked.

"Not a thing, Dave. I won't know for sure till I post her, of course, but right now I'd say the cause of death was a fractured skull."

"Those bumps didn't look so bad though," Walt said dubiously.

"That doesn't mean much," the M.E. said. "When a person's hit hard enough on the chin, the force of the blow is transmitted to the point where the jaw hinges on the skull. That causes a fracture, and a

lot of times it's fatal. The brain's a semi-solid, Walt, and it doesn't take much to damage it, or even tear it away from the skull altogether."

I nodded. "The skin wasn't broken, so the murder weapon was probably somebody's fist. And besides, if the killer had used a club or something, say, he'd have hit her almost anyplace else but on the jaw."

The M.E. took a deep drag on his cigar. "How'd you boys make out?"

"No good," I said.

"No identification at all?"

"Not a bit."

"That's odd."

"Yeah," Walt said. "The only clothes in the room were the ones she had on. Nothing in the closet, not even a suitcase. And nothing in the dresser. No letters. No anything. She must have used this room for something else besides living in it. We did find a purse, but there wasn't any identification in it. If she had any identification at all, then it must have been in a wallet, and somebody took it along with him."

"You're sure she wasn't attacked, Doc?" I asked.

"I can't be positive until I get her downtown, Dave. But I'd say no. There's no evidence of that at all. Her lipstick was a little smeared, you noticed, so she'd probably been kissing somebody. But I don't think there was anything more than that."

"I've got a hunch this is going to be one of the tough ones," Walt said. "It just smells tough, if you know what I mean."

The M.E. got up and walked to the door. "Well, the sooner I get started on the autopsy, the sooner I'll know whether I can give you any more help."

Walt went over to the open window and sat down on the sill. "You got any ideas, Dave?" he asked.

"Just the shoes," I said.

"The shoes? What about them?"

"The rest of her clothes are going to be hard to trace," I said. "They're nice enough, but they're just like a million other garments. They aren't expensive, and all they've got in the way of labels is the manufacturer's name. They could have been bought in any of a thousand places, all over the country. But the shoes are something else again. They're Jules Courtney shoes, and that makes them just about the most expensive shoes she could buy."

"So?"

"They can be traced. The Jules Courtney outfit stamps all their shoes, not only with their trade name but with the name and address of the retailer to whom they're shipped. This girl's shoes were bought at a store in Atlanta, Georgia, Walt."

"Fine. Nothing like an out-of-town corpse on your hands."

I moved toward the door. "Let's take another crack at that super."

We left a patrolman in the murder

room and took the super down to his living quarters in the basement.

He was middle-aged, surly, and about half drunk. "I told you guys I don't know nothing about the girl," he said. "She come in looking for a room last Friday. She paid me a week in advance, and that's all I see of her."

"You told us before that you didn't know her name," I said. "How come? You had to sign a receipt for the rent, didn't you, Jacobson?"

"Receipt? Hell no, I don't sign no receipts. It's too much trouble. If people don't like the way I run this house, then they can go live someplace else."

"She didn't even tell you her name?"

"I told you once. No. She asked me for a receipt, and I said no dice — so what'd I care what her name was?"

The wall behind Jacobson's bed was covered with photographs torn from magazines and newspapers. Nothing but girls. Some in bathing suits and some nude. Walt walked over to look at them.

"Kind of like the ladies, eh, Jacobson?" Walt said.

"All right, so I like girls. Who doesn't, for God's sake?"

"We've talked with the other people on the third floor," I said. "Nobody knew the girl at all. Nobody had seen her. They'd never even heard her in there. She have any company, so far as you know?"

He shook his head. "As long as the tenants don't bust up the furniture, I don't ask no questions. I don't spy on them. I just plain don't give a damn what they do. Maybe she had company, maybe she didn't; I don't know."

"You mean to say you had a girl living in your house almost a week, but you never saw her but once, and never heard any of the other tenants say anything about her?"

"That's right. How many times do I have to tell you?"

"How about when you took towels and linen up there?"

"Towels and linen ain't due till tomorrow."

"Where were you last night?"

He moistened his lips, staring at me. "You got nothing on me, copper."

"Answer the question," I said.

"You going to take me down?"

"I'll damn well take you down if you don't open up."

"I ain't saying till I have to."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"The people I was with — well, I don't want to cause no trouble."

"How would you cause them trouble?"

"If their husbands knew I'd been with them, there'd be trouble."

"These are two married women, you mean?"

"Yeah."

"Two of them, Jacobson?"

"Yeah."

"Come on," I said. "We're going down to the station house."

"Now, wait a minute. You can't —"

"I'm tired of fooling with you. On your feet."

He chewed at his lower lip a moment, glaring at me balefully. "All right. What the hell. I was in the first floor rear with Mrs. Cressy and Mrs. Austin. Their husbands work at night, up in Queens someplace. I was there all night."

The M.E. had told us the girl had been murdered about midnight, give or take an hour either way.

"Listen," Jacobson said, "if Cressy and Austin find out I was up there, they'll —"

"We're just interested in where you were," I told him. "If your story holds up, that's as far as we take it."

"I never left the room," he said. "There's a bathroom goes with their place, so I didn't even —"

"Those two couples live together?"

"Yeah. They share the same apartment."

"We'll check," I said. "And meantime, Jacobson, don't run off anywhere."

"Don't worry," he said. "I got nothing to hide — except I sure as hell hope you won't tell —"

"It's a little late to fret about that," I told him. "Come on, Walt."

We checked with Mrs. Cressy and Mrs. Austin. They said Jacobson had been in their apartment until

a little after five o'clock that morning. Both of them were sure he hadn't left the apartment, even for a moment. That canceled out the super, at least for the time being. Neither Mr. Cressy nor Mr. Austin was home, and their wives told us the men often stopped at bars after they got off work, and that sometimes they didn't get home until around noon. Both were very anxious that we not tell their husbands they'd entertained Jacobson.

We talked to as many of the other tenants as we could find, and then I left Walt to round up the others while I went over to check with the Missing Persons Bureau and send a wire to the Chief of Police at Atlanta. There wasn't much I could do with the wire. I concentrated on giving the best physical description I could of the girl, mentioned the Jules Courtney shoes, their size, color, style, and the name of the store where they had been bought.

There had been nineteen women reported missing in New York during the last twenty-four hours, I found. I skimmed through the sheaf of flimsies and discarded all but two of them as soon as I glanced at the data on their sex and color. Either of the two remaining reports could have fitted the murdered girl. It happens that way sometimes, though not often. I went back to the heading of the one on top and read it through again more slowly.

There wasn't much in it to help me decide.

POLICE DEPARTMENT

City of New York

REPORT OF MISSING PERSON

Olsen	Thelma	G.
Surname	First Name,	Initials
Norway	F 17	W
Nativity	Sex	Age
418 W. 74th, Mnhtn.	Leaving home address	
Address	Last Seen At	
5/3/54	Unknown	
Date and Time Seen	Probable Destination	
Unknown	5/4/54 6:20 A.M.	
Cause of Absence	Date and Time Reported	

I went down the PHYSICAL (NOTE PECULIARITIES) column. Everything checked. There were no peculiarities. But the CLOTHING column told me that Thelma Olsen had been wearing a blue cotton dress with small red figures, high heeled shoes, no coat of jacket. The murdered girl's dress had been blue, but it had been silk jersey, not cotton, and there had been no figures. In itself, that didn't mean too much. Descriptions of women's clothing, especially if they're made by a man, can be pretty far off. We'd had plenty of cases where men couldn't remember whether women were wearing dresses, or skirts and sweaters. Women,

on the other hand, are seldom wrong about clothing, and they can usually give an extremely accurate description of it, even after a lapse of months, or even years.

I read down to the space for REMARKS:

Girl is on probation on possession of narcotics charge (marijuana), no other arrests or convictions. Looks much older than true age. Once, when fifteen, passed as eighteen and toured country with dance orchestra. Father has long record of D&D arrests, four short-term sentences.

The report had been filed by telephone with the MPB by the girl's father.

When I read the second report, I discovered I'd missed something. The girl fitted the description, all right, but her weight was given as 145 pounds. The murdered girl had been, at the most, about 115. There was the possibility of error, but it looked as if Thelma Olsen was my best bet.

Before I left the Missing Persons Bureau, I called the assistant M.E.

"Nothing much, Dave," he said. "She hadn't been attacked. That's for sure. And she did die of a fractured skull, as I thought. We found a dental poultice in her mouth, tucked down between a lower left molar and her cheek."

"Look like she'd been to a dentist recently?"

"No. There's an abrasion on the gum, and she probably was troubled with it from time to time."

"Doesn't seem to be much point in checking dentists, then."

"I'm afraid not. She's never had any restorations or extractions. This dental poultice acts as a counter-irritant. They're sometimes pretty effective."

"You know the brand?"

"I'd guess offhand it's a Feldham poultice."

"Yeah. I've used them myself. Anything else?"

"We found some blue fibers in the finger nail scrapings. There's enough of them to match up under a comparison microscope with any blue material you happen to come up with."

"How about her dress?" I asked. "That was blue."

"Not the same kind of fiber, Dave. We've already checked. Not even the same shade." He paused. "That's about all, so far, I guess."

"Thanks," I said. "I'll check with you a little later."

I phoned the lieutenant commanding my squad and asked him to detail some men to talk to people in the neighborhood of the brownstone where the girl had been murdered. I made sure all of them would have copies of her photograph, which had already been developed and printed in the lab, and told the lieutenant about the dental poultice. He said he'd detail a detective to check all the drugstores in the neighborhood.

I hung up, and then dialed the Bureau of Criminal Identification

to see if I could expedite the check on her prints. They'd just finished. The girl had never been printed, at least in New York. A copy of her print card would go to the F.B.I. in Washington, D.C., of course, but we couldn't count on a reply today, and possibly not before tomorrow morning.

I was just debating whether it might not be a good idea to knock off for lunch, when the answer came in on my wire to the Chief of Police at Atlanta.

POLICE DEPARTMENT, NEW YORK CITY, EIGHTEENTH PRECINCT, DETECTIVE SQUAD, HOMICIDE, ATTENTION DETECTIVE-SERGEANT DAVE EMORY — RE YOUR QUERY THIS DATE STOP ONLY MISSING PERSON ANSWERING DESCRIPTION IS LOUISE ANN JOHNSON STOP ESCAPED POLICE CUSTODY MONDAY LAST WHILE BEING TRANSFERRED FROM TRAIN TO POLICE VAN STOP LOUISE HAS TWO INCH SCAR RIGHT FOREARM AND PARTIAL DENTURE WITH RIGHT UPPER INCISOR CANINE BICUSPID AND MOLAR STOP ADVISE IF THIS TRUE OF SUBJECT GIRL STOP ONLY ONE OUTLET JULES COURTNEY SHOES HERE STOP THEY NOW CHECKING RECORDS AND SALESPEOPLE TO DETERMINE IDENTITY PURCHASER OF SHOES DESCRIBED YOUR WIRE STOP WILL ADVISE SOONEST STOP

Louise Ann Johnson's partial dental plate ruled her out, and I wired the Chief at Atlanta to that effect.

I had a sandwich and a cup of coffee, and then I went back to the

precinct, checked out a car, and drove over to 418 West 74th Street to talk to Thelma Olsen's father.

I asked him first for a photograph of Thelma, and he brought out a muddy snapshot of a girl in shorts and a halter, holding a tennis racket. The photo had apparently been taken around noon. The eyes were deeply shadowed by the eyebrows and the shadow of the nose extended down beneath the lower lip. You could tell that she had good features, and was probably very pretty, but that was about it. She might or might not be the girl whose skull someone had fractured.

"How long ago was this taken?" I asked.

"About two years ago."

"You haven't got anything more recent?"

"No."

"Look, Mr. Olsen, your daughter was a professional singer. You sure there aren't some better pictures of her around here? Publicity shots, or maybe a composite?"

"No. She had an apartment of her own, until she got arrested. They made her move back here, but she didn't bring any of her stuff with her. Nothing but clothes, that is."

"You know where this apartment is?"

"She'd never tell me. She said she was going back there, as soon as her probation was over." He paused. "She didn't want me showing up around there, I guess."

"She have an agent?"

"Yeah. Let's see . . ." He thought a moment. "Guy named Tyner, down in the Brill Building."

I went down to Tyner's office, took one fast look at the nine by twelve glossy he showed me, and knew I was no further along than I'd been when I first picked up Thelma Olsen's missing-person report. I thanked Tyner and went back downstairs to the cruiser. Later on I found that Thelma had been picked up at a reefer pad over a curio shop in Greenwich Village. It seems one of her personal enemies, another girl, had seen Thelma go there, knew she was on probation, and saw an opportunity for personal vengeance by tipping off Thelma's probation officer.

I drove back to the brownstone. Walt Nelson, my partner, hadn't found out a thing. He'd talked to the rest of the tenants, but no one had even seen the girl, let alone known anything about her. Or so they said. Walt had had to call a few people in from their jobs, and the hard time they'd given him had left him a little bitter.

"Funny thing," he said, "but the very ones that yell the loudest when you ask them for help are the same jokers that yell the loudest for help when their own toes get stepped on. I never saw it fail."

We left a patrolman staked out in the murder room, and started back to the precinct. Neither of us said much on the way. I knew Walt was probably thinking the same thing

I was — that we'd shot an entire day on the case, without turning up anything whatever. The first hours after a murder are the most important ones for a detective, and a lot of them had already gone by. You can usually tell, in those first few hours, just how the case will go. And this one was going nowhere. Our score was exactly zero, and it was beginning to look as if it might stay that way for a long time.

And then, when we walked into the squad room, the picture changed completely. We hadn't been there more than a minute when I got a phone call from the morgue. It was from Johnny Morton, who had been on his job a long time.

"Listen, Dave," he said. "I'm calling from a pay phone in the hall. There's a kid in my office, see, and he wants to look at that girl you guys are working on. He hasn't got a permit, and he's acting funnier than hell. He isn't drunk, but he kind of acts that way; I mean, like maybe he isn't sure just what's going on. He won't say who he is, or why he wants to see the body. I stalled him by saying I had to leave the office to check with somebody else on letting him in without a permit. But he isn't going to stay put long, Dave. You'd better get a move on."

We got a move on. The boy was still in Johnny's office. He was a nice looking kid, tall, and very thin. We took him out to the cruiser to talk to him. I could see what Johnny had meant about his acting funny.

The kid was so scared he couldn't think straight.

I climbed into the back seat with him while Walt got into the front, and then I said, "All right, son. What's your name?"

"I knew this would happen," he said. His voice was shaky, as if it wouldn't take much to get him bawling.

"What's your name?" I asked again.

"Ted," he said. "Ted Wimmer."

"Why'd you want to look at that girl, Ted?"

"I — I read about it in the newspapers, and I — I just had to see her again, that's all."

"Did you kill her, Ted?"

"No! God, no, mister!"

"What was your interest in her?"

"She — well, we were going together. I —"

"What's her name?"

"Grace Knight." He seemed to be pulling himself together. "But she didn't like Grace. She made me call her Judy."

"How long did you know her?"

He frowned thoughtfully; then, "From the first part of February. I met her right after she got to New York."

"Where was she from? Atlanta?"

"Atlanta?" he repeated. "No. She was from Nebraska. From Omaha."

"You sure about that?"

He nodded. "That's about all she ever talked about. She liked it here in New York, but she kept talking

about Omaha. She was pretty homesick, I guess."

"She ever mention being in Atlanta?"

"No. This was the first time she ever left her home town."

I studied his face a moment. "When was the last time you saw her, Ted?"

"Yesterday afternoon. We went to a movie."

"You didn't see her last night?"

"No."

"Where were you around midnight last night?"

He hesitated. "I — I was just walking around the streets."

I didn't say anything.

"I don't know where I walked, exactly. I just felt like walking. I guess I must have walked nine or ten miles altogether."

"What time did you get home?"

"About one."

"Just walking around, eh, Ted?"

"I know how it looks, officer, but —"

"We'll take that up a little later," I said. "Now here's the way it is, Ted. If you've got nothing to hide, you've got nothing to fear from us. Understand? You tell the truth, and tell all of it, and you'll be okay."

He nodded, swallowing hard a couple of times.

"All right," I said. "Now tell us this. Who do you think might have killed her?"

"That bastard she started running around with," he said.

"What's his name?"

"I don't know. Honest to God, I don't. I just know she started fooling around with somebody else. She wouldn't tell me his name or anything else about him. I guess maybe she was afraid I'd beat him up." He reflected a moment. "And I *would* have, too."

"She must have dropped something about him, Ted. Think again."

"Well . . . she did say once that he really knew his way around. She said he was always getting things for her at half price; things like that."

"Like what, for instance?"

"Oh, you know . . . clothes and stuff."

"You ever in her room, Ted?"

"Her room? Not a chance. That hotel she lived in won't let men past the front door."

"Hotel?"

"Yeah. That girl's hotel over on the east side."

"She wasn't killed at any hotel, Ted."

"I know that. The paper said where she was killed. The way I figure it, this guy and Judy rented that room just so they could use it once in a while." His voice was starting to break again.

He could be right, I knew. And if the rest of his story was true, then he probably *was* right. It would explain why we hadn't found anything in the furnished room but the girl herself. If she and this other guy were using it for a trysting place,

she wouldn't be likely to keep anything there.

We talked to Ted for another twenty minutes, but we didn't get anything more. When he started getting rattled and panicky again, we took him down to the precinct. We left him in a material witness room, with a police matron to keep him company, and went down to the corner for a cup of coffee.

We sat there, drinking coffee and mulling things over, and suddenly I got a flash. I pushed the coffee cup back and stood up.

"What goes?" Walt asked.

"We do," I said. "Out to Long Island."

"What's out there?"

"The Jules Courtney shoe factory. I've got an idea that'll bug me to death till I check it."

"All right, so let me in on it. I work for the same people you do, you know."

I told him about it on the way out to the factory. I'd been thinking about the dead girl's expensive shoes off and on ever since we'd come on the case, and talking with Ted Wimmer had triggered something in my mind.

"It was those shoes that threw us," I told Walt. "They were stamped with the name of a store in Atlanta, Georgia, and so we naturally assumed they'd been bought there. That's where we were wrong."

"Yeah? How so?"

"Because those shoes could have been bought right at the factory.

It should have hit us before, damn it."

"Give."

"All right. When a shoe company with a reputation like Jules Courtney's makes up an order for a retailer, they stamp his name and address on their product, but before those shoes are shipped, they're checked and double-checked for the tiniest flaw. If a knife slipped a fraction of an inch somewhere, or there's a stitch out of place, they put those shoes aside."

"So?"

"They won't ship shoes with flaws, but they're still perfectly good shoes, so they mark the price down to the actual cost of manufacturer and put them up for sale to their employees."

Walt grinned and pressed down on the gas pedal a little harder.

We got to the Jules Courtney factory about ten minutes before closing time. We talked to the office manager, and then to a records clerk. The clerk was very efficient. Five minutes after we'd given her the size, style and other data in connection with the dead girl's shoes, she was back with a signed receipt. They had been sold to one Ernest Coleman, an employee on the fourth floor.

It was past closing time when we got to the right floor and the right department. Everyone had left except one of the floor foremen.

"It wouldn't have done you any

good if you had come earlier," he told us. "Ernie Coleman didn't come to work today."

We went back to the office, got Coleman's home address from the office manager, and left the building.

Coleman lived in a railroad apartment just off Third Avenue. He was about twenty-five, about average height, and very muscular. He was wearing a stained T-shirt and a pair of overall pants. When he stood back to let us in, I caught the smell of whiskey. But he didn't look drunk; he just looked sick. He didn't seem surprised to see us. I got the impression he was even relieved.

He told us his mother and father were out for a while, and then he sat down on the old-fashioned davenport and stared at us. Walt and I sat down in chairs facing him. For a long time none of us said anything.

Then I said, "There'll be finger prints, Walt."

"Yes," Walt said. "There'll be finger prints. And of course Ernie here wasn't home last night, Dave."

"That's right," I said. "And then there's the blue fibers under her nails, Walt."

Walt got up and moved through the apartment, trying all the closet doors. Ernest Coleman and I sat there and stared at each other. After a while Walt came back with a blue sleeveless sweater. He sat down again and ran his finger tips across the material. "Yes," he said. "There were blue fibers under her

nails. The boys in the lab can put them under the comparison microscope with some of *these* fibers, and know right away, eh, Dave?"

A full minute went by, and then another.

Finally Ernest Coleman took a deep breath, let it out slowly, and gently rubbed the knuckles of his right fist with the palm of his left hand.

"She fell for me," he said softly. "She was as dumb as they come. I — I thought she'd get round heels for me . . . but she didn't." He was silent a moment. "I got her to rent that room for us, and when she did I thought I had a good setup. But she . . . she was crazy . . ."

Walt started to say something, but I caught his eye and shook my head. He frowned and compressed his lips.

"She — she just wasn't right somehow," Ernest Coleman said. "She'd let me kiss her, and that's all. I know she was burning up half the time, but she'd never . . . she'd never . . ."

I nodded. "Exactly what happened, Ernie?"

The sound of my voice seemed to startle him. He moistened his lips. "Last night it got so bad I couldn't stand it any more. I tried to, but she wouldn't — and all at once I

just saw red and I hit her. She started to scream, and all I could think of was that she was going to get me in trouble. I don't know — I didn't mean to kill her. I just wanted to stop her from screaming. I just meant to knock her out."

I glanced at Walt. He shrugged and shook his head.

"And then, Ernie . . .?" I asked.

"When I found out she was dead, I lost my head. I thought I'd have to get away. I took all the stuff that might identify her and beat it. I thought the longer it took the cops to find out who she was, the more time I'd have to get away. But after a while I knew I'd have a better chance if I *didn't* run away. I — I didn't think you could tie me to her."

I got up and walked to the telephone to call the precinct and tell them to let the other boy go.

When I'd finished my call, Ernie Coleman said, "Can we wait just a few minutes, till my folks get here? I — I want to tell them what happened." He looked down at his right hand, with the faintly bruised knuckles. "It'll be easier for them, if they hear it from me."

I nodded. "All right, Ernie." I went back to my chair and sat down to wait.



The owner of the bar knew how to take care of unwelcome customers. Nothing gave him any trouble — until he met up with the

Necktie Party

BY ROBERT TURNER

THERE was a quiet, restrained atmosphere about the place that you could feel the moment you walked into it. It looked pretty much like any other Times Square side street cocktail lounge and restaurant. There was the bar and leather-cushioned booths and a dining room in the back. The lighting was subdued without being gloomy. But there was this feel, this air about the place that somehow seemed inviolable, so that cruising drunks, going from bar to bar to look for conversation or excitement or a pickup, walked in here and sensed the atmosphere and



turned around and walked right out again. Or perhaps had one drink and used the Men's Room and then left.

The owner prided himself that in twenty years in the business there'd never been any violence in his place. Some close calls, but never any real action. This was because of the owner's infallible judgment of character. He knew the kind of people he wanted as customers almost on first sight and everything was done to encourage them; extra service, drinks on the house, credit, check-cashing, almost unctuous hospitality. The owner also knew the

kind he didn't want. Everything politely possible was done to discourage them. His was a place for gentlemen and ladies, a place to drink, even to get quietly and genteelly drunk if you cared, to have a good meal after a few drinks and to relax.

He was a short, stocky, shingly bald man, the owner, with a round, seriously intelligent face. He spoke precise English and was unusually well read and was an almost preciously agile conversationalist. With the favored customers, that is. With the others he was gentle but firm. That was the secret of running his kind of a place. When he listened to the other owners discuss the various troubles they had in their places and what to do about them, he couldn't help smiling a little smugly.

It was so easy. If you had any perceptiveness at all, you could spot by a customer's reactions when he first came in, while he was taking his first drink, by every little action and reaction, whether or not he had already taken too much, if he was hostile, inclined to boisterousness. You studied these things and it became very easy. The owner had trained his bartenders and waiters to do likewise, although, of course, they were never as good at it as he was because it didn't matter as much to them.

The bartender, this night, was new. He was a relief man the union had sent up when the regular night

man called in sick. The owner watched him work, from his place by the cash register at the end of the bar, and was quite pleased. The bartender was medium height, clean cut but not so handsome that the men customers would resent him or the women start trouble by flirting with him. He had the right combination of friendliness and reserve and he knew his job. He seemed to be a smart, a good man. The owner was quite pleased.

The real test came, though, when, toward the end of the dinner hour, the door burst open and a man in an old Army field jacket came in. He was clean-shaven but he somehow looked rumpled and dirty. His hair was long and it stuck up in sprouts all over his head as though he'd just got out of bed. It was medium brown hair, except for a perfectly square patch of white on one side. He had a thin, ferret-like face, with a lot of blackheads in it. His eyes were kind of strange; not staring, exactly, but too intense, sort of fixed in their gaze and on nothing in particular. He took a seat at the bar between two groups of regular customers. The conversation at the bar, which had been rather spirited in a controlled sort of way, died down when this man sat at the bar. Everybody watched the drumming of his fingers. He didn't look at anybody. He looked down at the bar.

The owner smiled a little. It would be interesting to see how the bar-

tender handled this one. It was obvious that he was not *their* kind of customer. He wondered how long it would take the bartender to get rid of him.

The bartender stopped in front of the man in the field jacket and said: "Yes, sir?"

The customer, without looking up from the bar, said, a little thickly: "Bar whiskey and water." He pulled a crumpled dollar bill from his pocket and wadded it onto the bar.

The drink was poured and the customer took it straight, washing it down with the water. He looked up, then, toward the bartender, but the bartender had walked away to the other end of the bar and was talking there with a regular customer. The man in the field jacket kept staring at him and drumming his fingers on the bar. Twice the bartender turned and saw the customer staring at him but politely, smilingly ignored him, even though it was obvious that the man wanted another drink. The owner smiled. The bartender was doing fine.

The first few seconds that the customer banged his glass on the bar for attention, the bartender continued to ignore him. Then he turned slowly and walked toward him. With his eyebrows arched disapprovingly, the bartender said softly: "You don't have to do that. You're disturbing the other customers."

"Oh, I am?" The customer's voice was too loud. There was a

strange tightness, an almost clenched sound to it. His fixed gaze now centered straight onto the bartender's eyes. "You've been ignoring me. What the hell am I, a bum or something, I can't get served? This is a high class gardam place or something?"

The bartender pursed his lips. "Please, sir! I'm afraid I can't serve you any more. You've had enough."

"Enough?" The customer said. "What do you mean, enough? I'm not drunk. You pour me another drink. You hear me?"

The owner frowned. He couldn't have this. This loud fellow was disturbing his regular people. He watched the bartender and the raucous customer while their eyes locked for a moment and he saw something he didn't understand. The bartender flinched as though he'd been struck. He seemed to go pale. Too abruptly, he turned away from the customer and, with an agitated quickness, walked toward the owner at the end of the bar.

He glanced back nervously and saw the customer still sitting there, drumming his fingers on the bar and staring fixedly into the backbar mirror. The bartender said: "What do you want me to do? If you ask me, I think we'd better give him another one, pacify —"

The whole bar was silent now. All the regular customers were pointedly avoiding the man in the Army field jacket. The silence was almost chilling. The owner said:

"Don't be absurd. Give in to him and you'll have him sitting here the rest of the night, maybe getting more pugnacious after another drink. Don't do anything. Just let him sit there. He'll get bored. Ignore him. He'll leave after awhile. I've been through this thousands of times. If he doesn't, I'll talk to him and get rid of him."

The bartender licked his lips. He was sweating a little over the bridge of his nose. He said: "This man isn't any ordinary drunk, sir. I don't think we ought to fool with him, antagonize him."

"What do you mean?" The owner was nettled at his judgement being questioned.

"There's something *wrong* with him. He's ready to flip. Believe me. I know this kind. I worked at a State Hospital for a year and a half. I've seen lots of 'em like that and I'm tellin' you, this one is just about to go."

The owner raised on tiptoe and looked over the bartender's shoulder. The customer was just sitting there, drumming his fingers and looking down at them.

"I think you're being melodramatic," the owner said. "But even if you're not, all the more reason to get rid of him."

Abruptly, the bartender said: "Excuse me. I've got to go to the john." He pushed past the owner.

Up at the middle of the bar, the customer started banging his empty glass on the bar. The owner sighed.

He walked up there, his round, intelligent face quietly composed. He put his hands flat on the bar in front of the customer, who didn't look up but stopped banging his glass.

"Sir," the owner said, very softly. "We appreciate your patronage and we'd love to have you come back some other time but right now we feel you've had your share. You look like a nice intelligent fellow. Surely you can understand my position. We're just not allowed by law to serve anyone who has passed a certain point. Please be a nice chap and go home now and come back and see us some other time."

The customer looked up at the owner. His dirty gray eyes fastened on the owner's and the owner saw what the bartender had meant, but that odd glassiness, he knew, was because this man had taken too much to drink. He was really plastered, even though he could still sit and probably walk straight. It wasn't an unfamiliar type of drunkenness.

A rather vacant smile formed on the customer's peaked face, showing small, crooked, carious teeth. "Is that the way it is?"

The owner smiled back, nodding. He told himself this was the way to do it. Gentle but firm. It always worked. He wished the bartender was here to watch him in action. He felt the admiring glances of his regular people and could almost feel the easing up of tension in the place.

"Or is it just that you don't like my looks?" The customer said. One hand, small, thin-fingered and dirty, gestured toward himself. The other one clenched the water glass so hard his knuckles showed white and the owner feared for a moment he might break the glass.

"Don't be absurd, sir," the owner said, gently and firmly. "A customer is a customer to us. And there's nothing wrong with the way you look."

"I see," the customer said. His hand loosened from around the glass. "In that case, I believe I'll have something to eat. There's no law against serving me food, is there? Let me see a menu." He still spoke thickly but it wasn't the usual drunken kind of thickness, the owner observed. It was more as though his tongue was suddenly too big for his mouth.

The owner thought fast. He had to settle this once and for all. He had to get rid of this fellow, this drunken or crazy or whatever-he-was bum. The drinking question was apparently over. But he couldn't have this one in his clean, quiet dining room, to disgust his regular dinner clientele. This wasn't any one-arm joint.

"I'm sorry, sir," the owner said. "We have a strict rule that gentlemen must wear a tie to be seated at a table here. A very strict rule. We couldn't possibly make an exception."

The customer looked startled. He

put his hand to the neck of the dirty T-shirt he wore under the field jacket. He looked along the bar and then craned to look back in the dining room. The owner smiled. He had checked and made sure that everyone in the place was wearing a tie before he spoke. The customer's eyes came back to his. They looked full of laughter, an almost childish, secret laughter.

"God damn," he said. "Have to have a tie to eat here, huh? I'm too drunk to be served liquor and I can't eat because I got no tie."

The owner shrugged his soft shoulders. "I'm sorry, sir. That's the way it is. You understand, of course." He moved away, indicating that the conversation was obviously over. The man would leave now. The owner glanced in the backbar mirror and saw the customer, shaking his head, dazedly, slide off the stool and stand up. The owner told himself that it was so easy if you knew how. There was no need to have any trouble with the bums, the misfits, the lowlifes. You were just firm but gentle and that was it. Who was the owner of the place, anyhow? Who decided these things? In quietness and gentleness, there was strength.

The owner decided that the bartender wasn't such a good man after all. There was no reason why he couldn't have handled the same thing in the same way. He could have if he hadn't let the man frighten him. You couldn't let these people frighten you, bluff you.

Abruptly, the owner realized that the customer in the field jacket hadn't left yet. He was standing behind the stool he'd vacated. He was looking at another man, a fat, prosperous-looking man with flowing white hair and horn-rimmed glasses, who had just entered and sat down at one of the booths. The fat man, who was one of the owner's regular people, had been for years, was looking at the menu and giving his order to the waiter who had instantly glided up to the booth.

The customer stood there, slight, medium height, hunching his narrow shoulders continually under the field jacket, both hands thrust into his pockets, and kept looking at the fat man. He watched the waiter take the fat man's order and move away. The owner wondered what was bothering the customer now, what was keeping him from leaving. And then he saw.

The prosperous-looking fat man was wearing an expensive sport jacket and slacks and a sport shirt but no tie. He suddenly became aware of the customer in the field jacket staring at him. He glowered back at him, indignantly, reddening around his puffy jowls a little.

The customer walked over to the fat man. He pointed at him and turned to the owner. "Where's his tie?" he demanded. His voice was raggedly shrill now. It stopped every other sound in the place.

He turned back to the fat man and moved right up next to the

booth. He said in the same keening voice, right into the fat man's now apoplectic face: "You've got to wear a tie to eat here, mister. They told me that. I can't eat here without no tie. You can't, either. A bare neck like you and I got ain't no good, you understand?" His voice rose until it hurt the eardrums. He mimicked the owner: "I'm sure you understand."

He drew a sobbing breath. "You got to have something around your neck. They said so. You got to." He giggled. "I'll give you something. I'll give you a necktie."

He pulled one hand from his pocket and it held a straight razor. He flicked it open. He reached down and caught the fat man's long white hair in his other hand and yanked his head back. "A Goddamn necktie you got to have to eat here." He slashed the razor across the fleshy folds of the fat man's throat. The fat man's big head looked as though it was going to fall off his shoulders but it didn't. The blood came out of him like a red waterfall and went all over the table and as he staggered up out of the booth and before he fell it went across the floor, halfway to the bar.

The customer with the razor jumped back out of the way of the blood. He wheeled as the screams of people at the bar shook the place, as they turned over bar stools, lurched, bleating, toward the door. He grabbed a woman and swiped the long straight blade across her bare

arm as she raised it to protect her face. Her wrist and hand hung loosely for a moment from the rest of her arm before she fainted.

The owner stood staring in stupefaction at the customer. He told himself that this couldn't be. This didn't happen in his place. And then he saw the customer coming toward him with the razor uplifted. The owner wanted to move, to run. He couldn't. He wanted to raise his arms to protect himself but they were too heavy. They wouldn't move. He watched the customer, rabid-eyed, his face twisted grotesquely, rushing toward him and knew that he was going to die but couldn't seem to understand it. Absurdly, he found himself wondering what had gone wrong, how could this have happened.

Then he saw the bartender pick up a bar stool and run up behind the customer and bring the stool down onto the back of his head. The customer's knees went out from under him but instead of falling, he

half turned around. He saw the bartender with the stool raised and arcing toward him again. The customer said: "I got to have a necktie, too." He stroked the glistening red blade across his own throat and looked down, smiling hideously at all the new blood before the stool hit him the second time and he went down.

The owner stood there for a long time, looking around, while the customers who hadn't reached the door before it was all over, tried to help the others who had fainted or gotten knocked down. Nobody was doing anything about the woman with the severed arm.

"Get a mop!" the owner screamed at the bartender. "Don't just stand here." He made a deep sucking breath. He said: "My place! My God, my place, look at my poor place!"

He leaned his elbows on the bar by the cash register and put his face into his hands and firmly but gently began to cry.



CRIME CAVALCADE

BY VINCENT H. GADDIS

Three-Color Crime

In Boston, last July, one James Cunningham, 26, became a dyed-in-the-wool check artist. When police picked him up, he had passed over a hundred worthless checks, sometimes fooling the same store owner three times. His method — a private beauty parlor of his own in a subway station locker, where Police Capt. George O'Donnell found that Cunningham kept a permanent cache of three bottles of hair dye — red, black and brown.

Right of Way

Police were unhappy after they arrested Henry Jensen of Rio Linda, Calif., for drunken driving, although they said he was indisputably under the influence. Jensen had been driving, all right, but along a railroad track. The judge ruled that his choice of a speedway made conviction impossible. A railroad track can't be legally defined as a public road or highway. However, Jensen was fined \$50 after he pleaded guilty of being drunk in an auto.

Nailed Down

A tool chest proved as effective as a gun for George Cox of Baltimore when he found a sleeping stranger

in his closet. Before summoning police, Cox nailed the door fast.

When the last nail was yanked out in the presence of officers, the emerging stranger identified himself as John Craddock of New York, 28 years old, and fond of his relatives. He had gone into Cox's closet, he said, "to look for his aunt."

O Happy Day

At McKeesport, Pa., last July, a woman probably fulfilled the ambition of a lifetime before her arrest. Gloriously drunk, she charged down a railroad track behind a roaring power lawn mower and smacked straight into another noisemaker, a slow-moving freight train.

Home Again

A male patient escaped from the State Mental Hospital in Weston, West Virginia, and patient police finally caught up with him several months later. He'd been hired as an attendant at the State Mental Hospital in Columbus, Ohio.

Convict Comedians

The State Prison in Menard, Ill., enlivens life for its convicts by a behind-bars radio-T.V. crime show produced by the prisoners themselves. Entitled "Hairnet," it opens with the announcement: "The story you are about to see is true. Only the

names have been changed to protect the guilty."

Bulldozing Burglar

Columbus, O., police thwarted a safe-burglary attempt which is unique in the city's history. They came upon a young man nudging his car along the street behind a 400 lb. safe, with his front bumper acting as a pusher. For almost three quarters of a mile, the patient thief revealed, he had been successfully transporting it. "I was just taking it down to the police station to turn it in," he explained, but shortly thereafter pleaded guilty.

Dead Man's Alibi

When William Brooks, 32-year-old veteran in Springfield, Ill., was arrested for burglary, the state apparently had a fool-proof case. The prosecutor claimed he had a signed confession, an eyewitness placed him at the scene of the crime, and police found a screwdriver in his car. Brooks, who had been convicted twice already, was facing life imprisonment.

But happily for the accused man, Uncle Sam thought he was dead, and coincidentally had cut off his VA disability payment. Because at the time of the burglary Brooks was in the Veterans' Administration Office, struggling to prove that it was another man of the same name who had died instead of himself, he was able as well to prove a perfect alibi. As the judge acquitting him remarked,

"Maybe Providence was watching over you after all."

Crime in High Places

Edward R. Clancy, 18, of Dennisport, Mass., never expects to apply for a job as Santa Claus. He's learned the hard way that chimneys are narrow.

District Court witness Nathan Mowry was mystified as he passed a store early one recent morning to hear cries and moans coming apparently from the sky. At last he decided the sounds were coming from the top of a one-story building. But climbing up, he found nothing but a pair of shoes on the roof. He dragged up some boxes for a ladder and peered down the chimney. Deep in its bowels he saw a sooty form, stuck fast.

Unhappily for the victim, not even the fire department rescue squad was able to help, and a mason was eventually summoned. It was several hours before Clancy was able to stand on his feet, more or less at large in the city jail. Before his belated rescue Clancy assured discoverer Mowry, "I'll never try to enter a place this way again!"

It's Fate

A motorist in Rutland, Vt. learned Fate was frowning upon him when his car struck a parked pickup truck, and the truck then rolled into the rear of a parked car. The two policemen investigating proved to be the owners of the damaged vehicles.

Tables Turned

In Lapeer, Mich., a policeman had the pleasure of ticketing his own wife's car for overparking. On her return she was confronted by a crisp sentence on the ticket's back — "Who's boss now?"

Mistaken Identity

One of the strangest imposture cases in the history of the United States happened in 1928 in connection with a child kidnaping case. On March 10th of that year nine-year-old Walter Collins of Los Angeles failed to return from a walk. It was almost a year later before he was proved to have been kidnaped and murdered by a maniac.

Meanwhile a nation-wide search began, and five months after Walter's disappearance a boy who looked almost exactly like him was discovered in Illinois. The child, who had just run away from unhappy home conditions, said upon questioning that he was the missing Walter. And before his own parents were found, some-

one — never identified — gave the boy enough information so that when he was sent to his supposed mother, Mrs. Collins, he was able to talk convincingly of the past both to her and other "relatives."

For three weeks the child succeeded in his strange impersonation but finally Mrs. Collins grew suspicious. Measuring the boy, she found him shorter by an inch and a half than before "he" had disappeared!

But when she went to the police with her story they immediately had her committed to an institution for the insane. It was five days before she was able to prove her sanity and shortly thereafter to make the boy confess.

Suing the arresting officers for false imprisonment, Mrs. Collins was awarded \$10,800.

But who persuaded the child to attempt the impersonation — and for what possible motive? After so many years this strangest feature of a strange case will probably never be explained.

The Old Man's Statue

THERE were six of us who volunteered to get rid of the thing.

We must have looked very brave to the people who lined the sidewalks around the square — men with grim faces, some with pajamas still on under their trousers; women, some in house-coats with their hair still in curlers, some silently but severely shooing home children who had defied stern orders.

They watched us as our picks broke up the concrete at the base of the statue.

They made no sounds as they stood pressed against the store fronts.

I wished they had. I wanted them to sing, or shout, or do anything to drown out the screams coming from the jail . . . screams that chilled the early dawn. . . .

BY R. VAN TAYLOR



There didn't seem to be any sense to it. All day long, Ben sat there, polishing the old bronze statue . . .

I first came to Mississippi from Memphis, where, formerly, I pounded out a column for the *Commercial* under the by-line of Hal Wilson. What drew my attention to Leeville was an advertisement in one of the trade journals. A man named Morris wanted to sell *The Leeville Star*. Reason given: bad health.

For a long time I had had a hankering for my own paper — just a small one; something that would be all mine. I figured this might be the break I had been waiting for.

From the moment I arrived at Leeville I was fascinated by it. It was an old town, but charming in a way. The small business district was built around a little park called “the square.” This was mostly grass, a few benches under spreading magnolia trees and, in the center, a life-sized statue.

Like the town itself, *The Leeville Star* was old and worn around the edges, yet I was sure that the Morris did not really want to leave. I remember how Morris’ wife, when she showed me through the living quarters upstairs, kept a bright smile on a face that did not want to smile. I remember how Morris, when he took me through the plant below, paused at the old press and caressed it; and how he began coughing and had to be led to a chair.

Late that afternoon we went to the office to talk money. I asked Morris what he would take. Then I told him what I would give, not

expecting him to accept. But he did accept. He grabbed at the offer like a drowning man grabbing at a straw.

It made me feel lousy.

After the deal had been closed I said, “Morris, I wish you’d tell me something. I’ve been wondering about it all day long.” I swung my chair toward the window and looked out at the square. “That statue out there — a local man?”

“Yes.”

“Well, why has that boy been polishing it all afternoon? He was out there when I got here — rubbing, rubbing. How long does that go on?”

At that moment a Cadillac parked at the side of the square. A colored chauffeur opened the back door and an old gentleman got out. He was a magnificent looking man — tall and erect in his seersucker suit, his white hair flowing beneath his hat, his hands resting gracefully on his cane as he watched the boy at the statue leave and come to him. Then they all got into the car and drove off.

I turned to Morris.

He was not in the office.

I went up to the apartment. Morris’ wife told me that he had gone to lie down — that he was not feeling well.

I returned to Leeville within a week and moved in. Morris and his family had already gone. When I got there at two in the afternoon I noticed that the boy was there in

the square, still polishing the statue.

I was unloading the car when I finally surrendered to my curiosity, left what I was doing and crossed to the square. As I approached the statue the boy stopped his polishing. He faced me. The expression in his pale blue eyes caused me to stop. He did not want me to come any closer.

He must have been around eighteen, I thought. Unkempt; something animal about him.

"That's a mighty fine statue," I said.

He kept watching me, blocking my way.

It was, actually, a fine life-sized statue of a distinguished-looking man, his hands gripping the lapels of his coat, something kind and compassionate in his lean, bronze face. The plaque at the bottom read: *Dr. John Henry Thompson; 1903* —

"Ben, why don't you let Mr. Wilson look at your father? He's not goin' to hurt him."

I turned and saw the old gentleman who had taken Ben away in the Cadillac a few days before. He continued, "You'll have to excuse Ben. It seems that some scoundrels smeared some filth on his father last night and Ben's rather upset about it. A mighty fine gentleman — Doctor Thompson. Ben's got real good reason to be proud of him."

"I'm sure that's true," I said.

The old gentleman looked at me quizzically; then his expression turned into one which was a combination of chagrin and realization. "Excuse

me," he said. "I imagine you are wonderin' what kind of an ill-mannered stranger you are talkin' to. The name is Parker — Senator Parker. I have the pleasure of representin' you at the state capitol."

He extended his hand. I was surprised at the strength in it.

"And now," he said, "you'll have to excuse me. It's been a pleasure to meet you and I wish you the greatest success with your paper." He glanced at the boy and said, "Don't be late for supper, Ben."

The senator left, his magnificent white hair flowing beneath his hat. Ben's gaze lingered on the old gentleman, a gaze that reflected admiration, even love, perhaps.

"Goodbye, Ben," I said.

He said nothing.

I thought he smiled slightly.

During the course of the next few days I was unable to answer the questions which kept nagging me. People simply would not talk about Ben, or anything connected with him. I did learn that Ben lived with the senator. . . .

After I got settled, I made the acquaintance of Dr. George Sewell and his wife. They were likeable people and I got along swell with them. One evening when I was at their home I put it straight to Sewell, figuring that I was a good enough friend by now to be let in on the town gossip.

"What gives with Ben?" I said.

Sewell shrugged. "The boy's not

quite all there," he said, in a tone which clearly indicated that he did not wish to talk about it further.

I didn't. . . .

In the meantime I put my mind to the paper. There was some new equipment that I needed but I did not have the cash to buy it. On Wednesday I went to the bank to borrow the money, or try to borrow it.

The cashier was a very pleasant man, agreeable to my plans and almost anxious to loan the money. We talked while the note was being drawn up. As we talked my eye was drawn to the window.

Something was going on out there in the square. Three teen-aged boys and Ben were fighting at the statue. No one was doing anything about it. When I called it to the attention of the cashier, he glanced briefly and made no comment.

I got mad.

I left the bank and ran across the square. They had Ben on the ground by now and were beating him. I grabbed one of the boys by the shoulder and jerked him away. The other two drew back when I did.

Ben lay unconscious at the foot of the statue, a statue now smeared with something that made me want to vomit. Ben had a bad cut over his left eye. His face was bruised. I picked him up in my arms and went across the square towards Doc Sewell's. A few people watched me.

Sewell met me at the door of his office.

"Let me in," I said. "This boy is hurt."

Sewell did not stand aside. "He'll be all right," he said.

"What's the matter with you?"

"He'll be all right, Hal. Put him down. Leave him alone."

"Look — what the hell goes on around here?"

"Put him down, Hal," Sewell said again.

He closed the door.

The weight of Ben kept tearing at me. I looked down the street and saw no one. I glanced the other way. A man stepped into his store and closed the door. I thought I heard the lock click.

Ben moaned.

I eased him to the sidewalk, bracing him up against the building. My handkerchief was clean. I took it out and started to wipe the blood from his puffed and swollen face.

When he came to, he seemed to understand that I was his friend and that I was trying to help him. But his concern for the statue was greater than the concern for his own wounds.

He got to his feet and ran back to the statue and began cleaning the filth from it. I could hear him sobbing.

I stood there for a moment, watching. Then I turned and walked back to the bank.

"I'll sign that note now," I told the cashier.

The cashier's face was flushed and unsmiling. "I've been thinking, Mr. Wilson. Perhaps it wouldn't be wise

for you to borrow money just now. Perhaps —”

“Say, what is this? Just a minute ago you thought it was a good idea.”

“I know, but on second consideration . . . you see, a great deal of money is involved, and —”

I walked out.

I tried to keep from looking at the square.

Later that night I drove over to Sewell's. He answered my knock, but he didn't ask me to come in. Wordlessly, he flipped off the porch light and came outside, fumbling his way through the darkness to the swing. He sat down in it, heavily.

“I thought you might be over,” he said in a tired voice.

When I did not answer, he lit a cigaret. I heard him take several deep drags on it. Then he said:

“Parker is a big man — not only locally, but all over the state. He's been state senator for as long as I can remember. . . . A strange fellow in many ways. . . . You ever read any philosophy, Hal?”

“A little.”

“The senator would go for Nietzsche,” Sewell went on. “Nietzsche believed that right was strength. That's the way the senator is. He's always loved the strong, detested the weak.”

“What's this got to do with —” I began, but he went on:

“Many years ago his wife, Clarabelle, was a strong and beautiful

woman. Then she developed polio and it left her a cripple. She wasn't crippled badly, but it is said that the senator never went to her room afterwards.

“Thompson was Clarabelle's doctor. He was a pretty big wheel himself back then — famous for his work in pellagra. The town erected that statue in the park to him while he was still living. A good doctor, I guess — but he made a bad mistake, a mistake that is bad for a doctor: he fell in love with his patient.” He stopped for a minute. He took a puff of his cigarette. Then he said:

“He tried every way he knew to get Clarabelle away from the senator, but the senator always blocked him. After it was learned that Clarabelle was pregnant, the senator shot and killed Thompson right out there in the square. Justified homicide, they called it. Nothing was ever done.

“Clarabelle had her baby — Ben. He was born mentally retarded. Clarabelle died during the birth. There was some question as to how she died, but again nothing was ever done about it. The senator kept Ben and raised him.”

Sewell dropped his cigaret and stepped on it. “But the senator never made any bones about who the boy's father was. He even taught Ben to worship his father's statue.”

I saw his shadow move as he reached for another cigaret.

“The senator must be insane,” I said. “Can't you, a doctor, under-

stand what he is doing? By making a living mockery of Ben's love for the statue, he feeds the hatred, the resentment, that he has carried with him all these years. Ben is the focus point of it."

"Ben is happy," Sewell said.

"Like hell he is. His life is a constant struggle to protect the statue from bird droppings — weather stains — pranks. I see that. You see that. The whole town sees that. Why doesn't someone try to do something about it?"

"A few have tried." Sewell's voice sounded tired. "Morris, the man you bought the paper from, was the last one to try it. Take a look at his back files. You'll find the story there. An editorial — then suddenly no business. A man has to live."

I was glad it was dark on the porch. But I knew that, really, I didn't care whether Sewell saw the way I was staring at him or not. Though he didn't have to see my face to know. The tone of my voice told him.

"Hasn't anyone else in this town got any guts?" I said.

He was quiet for a moment. Then he said, "I seem to be out of matches."

I flicked my lighter and held it out. I saw his eyes then. I saw the wetness in them.

"I'm sorry," I said. "Forget it."

Then I left.

About ten the following morning I was paid a visit by the Reverend

Mr. Byers, pastor of the leading church in the community. Byers was a small man, neatly dressed, and possessed a quick, nervous smile. His handshake was firm.

He invited me to his church; then suggested with considered casualness the advantage of running — as Morris had done — the weekly church schedule. Naturally I agreed.

"That is very nice of you, Mr. Wilson," he said. "Confidentially, the people here expect much from you. We have a fine little city here, one that can flourish and grow with your aid."

I looked at him for some time. I thought over carefully what I was about to say:

"Your town is dying," I said.

"Dying? I don't understand. What do you mean?"

As I nodded at the square, I saw color rise in his face.

"You are new here, Mr. Wilson," he said quietly. "Being an outsider, certain things must appear strange to you — which is only natural. But this is a Christian town, Mr. Wilson. The people here are good people; Senator Parker ranks at the top. He is a generous, warm, well-educated gentleman. I assure you that he would do nothing that is wrong in the eyes of God."

"Do you really believe that?"

"It is a fact. Why, Mrs. Logan, the senator's housekeeper, has told me of the multitude of blessings which the senator has brought to Ben. The senator has on occasion, she told me,

sat for hours at a time and told Ben what a great man his father was, knowing how happy it made the boy. Surely, under the tragic circumstances, such action indicates God's forgiveness and compassion."

"Or simply that the senator is the cruelest man who ever lived."

"Ben worships the senator! The boy is much better off under the senator's care than he would be in an institution."

He fumbled nervously for his watch. "You will have to excuse me," he said.

We shook hands again. He seemed anxious to depart.

His hand felt moist and weak.

The next day, when Ben came to his station at the statue, he became extremely upset.

During the night, someone had broken the little finger from the statue's right hand.

All day long Ben tried to repair his beloved statue. He tried to fashion another little finger from clay. This was not satisfactory, for shortly thereafter I saw him whittling at a piece of wood and knew that he was trying to carve one.

Finally Ben solved his problem.

His logic was simple and understandable enough, if you knew Ben. It was, to him, unthinkable that the statue go unrepaired. And since the original little finger could not be found, it had to be replaced with another. But he could not make another.

Therefore, he simply cut off his own little finger and tried to place it on the statue. . . .

I didn't hear anyone come right out and say anything, but I sensed that the town began to view Ben in a new light. Anyone "crazy" enough to cut off his own little finger might at some time do something even more violent. I sensed that perhaps the town's fear of the senator was being replaced by the fear of Ben himself.

Now, maybe someone would have guts enough to do what was right.

Including Hal Wilson.

I decided that some things were more important than money. I sat up all night setting the type for my editorial.

It was a wonderful editorial. Page one, first edition of the brand-new *Leeville Star*. I told the town what I really thought. I told them that Ben should have the protection of a good institution. I was real proud of my editorial.

Then the telephone calls began: *Cancel my ad; cutting down on expenses — no more ads; cancel; stop.*

Well, I had asked for it.

The rest of the day I thought about Morris. . . .

But my editorial wasn't a complete loss. I gained one ally.

The Reverend Mr. Byers.

Sunday morning, Byers preached a sermon — a sermon that centered around Ben. Although he avoided using names, everyone knew what he was talking about. That was certain.

However, no one will ever know, for certain, why Byers cut his throat that afternoon. It was known that, earlier in the afternoon, the senator had paid him a visit. But there was no indication as to why the minister took his own life. The note he left did not tell much. In it he apologized to his wife, praised her, and expressed the hope that God would forgive him.

Personally, I believe that the senator "had something" on Byers; that he held him in line with the threat of blackmail. Byers took his own life rather than be exposed, after he had given way to his emotions and defied the senator from the pulpit. But this was only a hunch.

Byers' death was a severe shock to Lecville.

During the night — undoubtedly because of Byers' death — vandals attacked the statue. This time they really fixed it.

They knocked off its head.

Ben, when he discovered what had happened, screamed and cried as he searched for the missing piece. First, he searched the square thoroughly; but the head was not to be found.

All morning long I heard his cries. And all afternoon. And even into the night. Lecville became a ghost town — no one on the streets; some stores closed; homes with doors and shades drawn.

No one would help Ben. It was evident that the town was still afraid of the senator. Besides, what *could* anyone have done to help Ben? . . . If I had known the answer to that, I would have helped him myself.

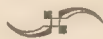
But, the next morning, as fingers of red chased the night from the sky, the town learned that all was well with Ben, for he had solved his problem. He had found a head for his beloved statue.

Of course, there was only one that was good enough, one noble enough, one worthy enough to replace that of his father.

It sat there, its magnificent white hair flowing in the early morning breeze.

Ben was proud as he wiped away the streaks of crimson which had coursed down over the bronze.

He didn't like it when we overpowered him and dragged him away. I can still hear him screaming.



Effective Medicine

The Doctor had to find the Mexican's wife, or be killed. And the Mexican's wife might be a thousand miles away . . .

A Novelette

BY B. TRAVEN



ONE afternoon, on coming home from the cotton field where I had worked all day long, I noted, outside the barbed wire fence of the bungalow I was living in, a Mexican peasant squatting on the bare ground. I did not know him because, as I learned later in the evening, he was from another village six or seven miles away. He was very poor and all in rags.

Having greeted me he waited patiently until I had dismounted from the burro I had been riding home on. When I had taken off the saddle and the burro had gone its way looking for cornstalks in the yard, the Mexican entered the front yard, came close and began talking.

He talked rapidly and in a confused manner. For a moment I thought him

to be on the high — that is to say, that he might have smoked more marijuana than he could digest. However, though he was now telling the end of his story, now the beginning, now the middle, all in confusion, I soon noticed that he was neither drunk nor doped, only very ignorant and evidently suffering from a nervous breakdown — as far as this can happen to a Mexican of his kind.

It was difficult for me to make sense of his story and for a long while I was unable to see which part of his story was the end and which the beginning or the middle. The farther he came in his story the more was he swept away by his emotion until he only blubbered or shouted absolutely incoherent phrases. Never once did he fully end his tale. Whenever I thought him close to the end and I was trying to catch up with the full meaning, I realized that he was already telling his story from the middle backwards to the start again. In this confused way he told me his story more than a dozen times and always with the same words, out of a vocabulary which barely consisted of more than three hundred different words. His mood changed constantly. Each time he started as if he were telling the story of somebody else, yet invariably he ended up crying almost hysterically.

“Look here, señor doctor, that old hussy and tramp that she is and always was, she is gone. She is gone with that ugly cabron and dirty son

of a heathenish dog, that thief Pánfilo, you know him, señor, the one I mean, that would steal the horns of the devil if they were not grown on, you know that house-breaker, and if you don't know him, so much the better for you because he steals barbed wire and cuts telegraph poles and the telegraph wire also and no hog is safe if he is around. I wish him the smallpox all over his face and the most terrible disease extra to make it worse for him. I come home. I come home from my work in the bush. In the bush I had to cut down hard trees for making charcoal; you see. I sell the wood and the charcoal if I have any to the agents — who are thieves, too. I come home tired and hungry. Home in my jacalito. I'm hungry more than a dog, that's what I am, from hard work in the bush. No tortillas ready. No frioles in the pot. Nothing. I tell you the truth, señor doctor, nothing. I call my woman, that old hussy. My *mujer* I mean. No answer. I look around. She isn't at home, my woman isn't. Her sack with her dress in it, and her shirt and her torn stockings, which are in that same sack also, are all gone. The sack used to hang on a peg. My *mujer* has ran away. She doesn't ever return. Never, such what I say. And she is so full of lice too, my woman is. I've no tortillas for me to eat. Nor black beans for my empty belly. Off she went like the stinking hussy that she is. If I only knew who she ran off with, that

useless old nag. I'll get *him*. And I'll learn him how to steal decent and honest women that belong to other men. He is a *mil* times worse than any dirty cabron." (*Mil* means thousand; to his kind, though, *mil* means anything between one hundred and one thousand billions.) "Now, I ask you, mister doctor señor, who will make tortillas for me? That's what I want you to tell me right now."

So he asked, but he did not wait for my answer and he went on with his story, hardly stopping to catch a full breath.

"Nobody is going to make me tortillas now. That's what it is, I tell you. She has ran away. I'll catch *him* and he won't live to tell who done it. I come home in my *choza*. I come home from the hot bush. Hungry and dying of thirst. I don't mind the thirst. I come home and no tortillas. No frijoles. She is gone. She has taken her sack with her dress and her stockings along with her."

At this point of his sad story he cried so bitterly that for the next three minutes it was difficult to understand what he was saying now because it was all blubbering. Slowly he calmed down once more. Yet, crying or not crying, he talked on and on like a cracked phonograph record.

"I come home. From the bush I come home and I've worked all day long under that blistering sun and no —"

"Now wait a minute, *manito*," I interrupted him before he went into his speech again and made it impossible for me to stop him before he reached that part of his story where he would have to cry for a few minutes. "Let's talk this over quietly. You've told me your heartbreaking experience fifteen times by now. I admit it is heartbreaking. But I can't listen to it a *mil* times because I've got other things to attend to. All I can say is that your *mujer* is not here in my jacal. Step in and look around and make sure."

"I know, señor mister, that she isn't in your house. A fine educated doctor like you would never even touch such a filthy one like her, and so full of lice that sometimes you might think the wind is in her hair, so fast it moves from all the lice in it."

The lice seemed to remind him once more of his loss and he started telling the story again. The whole thing began to bore me and I said: "Why, for hell's sake, do you have to tell all that just to me? Go to the *alcalde* — the mayor, I mean — and tell him your story. He is the proper person to attend to such matters. I'm just a simple doctor here without any political influence and no *disputado* backing me up. I've no power and so I can do nothing for you. Nothing, do you hear? Nothing at all. Go to the *alcalde*. He'll catch your *mujer*. It's his duty, because he is the authority in this place."

"That *alcalde*, you mean, señor?"

I can tell you right now and here that he is the biggest ass under heaven. That's why he was elected alcalde. And he is a thief too, and also a woman-raper. Just for his meanness and his stupidity it was that he got elected because no decent and no honest person had any word in that election, see? You ought to know that, señor."

"Anyway, amigo," I said, "he has to look after your troubles. And as I said before, I've no power, no power at all, to do anything for you. Get this in your mind, friend. I've no power."

"But you're wrong, mister cabalero. You've got all the powers in the world. We know this very well. And no mistake. You can pull bullets out of the bodies of killed bandits with fishing hooks and make them live again. I mean the boys with federal bullets in their bellies and legs. You understand what I want to say and what I know and what the *federales* would be so very eager to know also. Because you have all the powers to do anything under heaven. That's why you know where my woman is at this hour. Tell her that I'm hungry and that I've come home from the bush after much hard work. She has to make tortillas and cook frijoles for me. I'm very hungry now."

"Now look here, friend. Let's be calm about it." I spoke to him as I would have to a little boy. "See here, I've not seen your woman go

away. Since I've not seen where she went I can't tell you where she is at present. I can't even imagine where she perhaps might be. In fact, I know nothing, nothing at all. I don't even know her face or what she looks like. Please, amigo, do understand, I know nothing of her. And that'll be all. Thank you for paying me such a delightful visit. Now I'm busy. Good-bye. Adiós."

He stared at me with his brown dreamy eyes as if in wonder. His belief in the infallibility of a white, and particularly in the immaculate perfection of a Norte-americano had been shaken profoundly. At the same time, though, he seemed to recall something which had evidently been hammered into his head since he could speak his first words, and that was something which, in his opinion, was forever connected with the Americanos, as is the color green with young grass.

So he said: "I'm not rich, señor. No, I'm not. I can't pay you much. I've only two pesos and forty-six centavitos. That's all I have in the world. But this whole fortune of mine I'll give you for your work and for your medicine so that I can find my woman and get her back to my side, that hussy, because I am very hungry."

"I don't want your money. Even if you would give me *mil* gold pesos I could not get your woman back. I don't know where she is and therefore I can't tell her that you must have your tortillas and your frijoles.

Can't you understand, man, that I don't know where your woman is?"

Suspicion was in his eyes when he looked at me after I had finished. He was quite evidently not certain whether it was the little money he could offer me which kept me from helping him or that in fact I might really not know the whereabouts of his spouse.

Gazing for a few minutes at me in this manner he finally shook his head as if full of doubts about something of which he had thought himself very sure before. Honoring me once more with that suspicious glance, he left my place but not until I had told him several times more that I had to cook my dinner and could no longer stand idly around and listen to his troubles, for which I had no remedies.

As I learned a few days later, he visited practically all the huts of the village, where he told his story and reported also that this white medicine-man of whom they talked so highly was but a poor faker, ignorant of the simplest things of everyday life.

This low opinion of his was taken by the villagers for a grave insult upon themselves, since I was the pride of the whole community, who considered me one of the wisest and greatest medicine-men that have ever walked the earth. I do not know, but I can fairly well guess, what the villagers recommended him to do so as to make my mysterious powers work in his favor.

2.

Shortly after sunrise next day he returned to my place, placed himself outside by the barbed-wire fence, and waited there peacefully until I noticed his presence and came out to speak to him.

The moment he saw me feeding corn to my burro he called me. "Just for a very, very little short moment, señor mister, please. Please, come here close to the fence and listen what I've got to tell you. And you'd better listen terribly carefully because I'm serious. As a plain matter of fact I'm extremely serious this morning, because I haven't slept very much."

On stepping up to the fence I noted that while I was approaching he picked up from the ground a long machete which as I could see easily had been sharpened with utmost care. It must have taken him hours to give that heavy sword-like bush-knife such an almost razorlike edge.

Nonchalantly, though meaningfully, he moved this machete up and down before my eyes while he was talking again. Occasionally, just as nonchalantly, he examined the edge with his wetted thumb, and now and then pulling a hair out of his thick black scalp and cutting his hair softly, practically by only touching it with the edge. Whenever he did so he looked at me as if to make sure that I was observing how sharp that machete really was.

"So you won't tell me where my *esposa* is, señor?"

"It seems," I answered with dignity, "that you have a very good and very excellent machete. Looks like well-tempered steel to me."

"And good steel it is. And it has been made in your country. There you may be assured that it is the finest and the best steel we can buy down here. You'd better not make the mistake thinking that it might be German made, because a German made is no good, you cannot even cut cheese with it; if you try that the edge is gone for good. But they are very cheap. Only you cannot cut trees with them, not the sort we have got here in the bush. But the one I have got here will do anything I want it to do."

"Let me have a close look at it," I pleaded.

He put it through the fence but held the haft fast in his hand.

"This won't do at all. I must get a swing at it to see how good it is. I know something about steel."

"Oh no, señor mister, I won't let you have it. This excellent machete won't leave my hands, not before I know where my woman is. Just touch the edge. See. Now I think you'll understand that with one single stroke I could chop off the head of a burro from its trunk like cutting through wet mud. But should it be the head of a man, even that of a gringo, instead of that of a poor burro, I tell you, señor, I wouldn't need to make half so hard

a stroke as I would have to use for a burro, with a machete having an edge like this one, and made in your own country, where the best steel comes from. What do you think, señor?"

"Since you ask me, friend, I think a bullet is even quicker than a machete, and more certain too."

"Maybe. Surely it is. But a bullet, without a gun to fire it, is not much to compare with such a good American-made machete. Everybody here in the village knows very well that you haven't got a gun, not even an old Spanish muzzler. I know this or I wouldn't perhaps bring my fine machete along with me. Understand, caballero mister?"

"I understand all right, manito. I see you want to cut my fence-posts and carry them away. But you won't do that. You know that would be plain robbery. The *federales* would shoot you for banditry as soon as they come to this village again. It won't be long now and they will be on their way here once more looking for bandits."

"I don't need your fence posts. I wouldn't take them, not even for a gift. They're all termite-eaten anyhow and no good. I can get them better in the bush."

"Then what do you want? I've to get breakfast ready because I got to ride to my field and look after my tomatoes. I mean that I've got to go now, see, right now while the day is still cool and fresh."

"*Mil* times I have told you, señor

mister, what I want. That's why I sharpened my machete. I want my woman back. You will now tell me where she is so that I can catch her and give her a terrific thrashing before I'll let her cook frijoles for me."

"And *mil* times I've told you that I don't know where your *mujer* is."

"So you still insist on telling me that you can't find her for me?"

"That's what I'm saying all the time and I don't know what to say any more. So what are you going to do about it?"

"Maybe you don't know where she is. What I know for sure is that you can find her if you wish to. I can't give you *mil* gold pesos for I haven't any. I suppose I've got to speak frankly with you, señor. In other words, if you don't tell me right away where my woman is I will be very sorry, and sorry for you, I mean, because in such a case I am desperate and I must chop off one head. I won't promise whose head it might be which is to be chopped off, and I can't promise either that it might not be your head which is going to be cut off with one single stroke and with that fine American-made machete too. Perhaps it will be done by mistake, so to say. In other words, señor mister, it will be your head, and no mistake about that, I am sure."

He raised his machete high up and swung it round above his head as a drunken pirate would his cutlass. It looked dangerous enough. I was

cornered. I might, of course, try to escape into my bungalow. Sooner or later, though, I would have to come out and there he would be waiting for me. I had to get to my field to look after the crop, but he'd sneak up on me from behind or lay in ambush somewhere. His kind is patient. They will wait for days and weeks until they get their man. What does he care about killing somebody? He hides in the jungle. If he should finally be caught and fusilladed he will consider it his fate, which was his since he was born and from which he, in his opinion, could not have escaped nor avoided. Right now he is desperate. Without thinking of any of all the consequences which his murder will have afterwards, he, like a stubborn child, wants his wish come true immediately.

Again I told him the same thing I had told him twenty times the afternoon before. "I haven't seen the way your woman went. Therefore I don't know where she is now."

But my answer had lost its power. When he had told the villagers what sort of answer I had given him the day before, they had suggested what he ought to say if I were to tell him again that I had not seen his woman go away. He himself alone would never have come upon the answer he had in stock now, for his mind was not developed highly enough for such mental exercise. I was sure that the whole village was as much interested in the kind of medicine

I would give him as he himself was.

At that hour I did not know that he had talked to the villagers about our discussion the previous afternoon. But from the way he now presented his answer, I knew immediately that it could not be his own, but that he had memorized it after being taught what to say, because he not only used words entirely new to him, but also spoke up like a bad amateur actor.

"Listen here, señor," he said, "if I'd seen the way my *mujer* went when she left I would have no need to trouble you, for in that case I could do well and perhaps better still alone, than with the help of a medicine-man. All people in the village here have told me that you are a far-seer. They have told me that you have two little black tubes sewn together to make them appear like one. They say, because they know, that if you look through these tubes you can see any man or woman or dog or burro which might walk on that faraway hill yonder, and you can see an eagle perching on a high tree a hundred miles away. You have told the folks in this village that there are people living on some of the stars, because this earth we live on is also but a star only we can't see it as a star since we are on it. All people here have watched you often when, by night, you look with your black tubes up to the sky so as to see the people on the stars and what they were doing at that time of night and how they

lived there and how many cattle they had."

I remembered I had said something to this effect to a few of the younger men of the community.

"You've also told here that wise men in your country to the north have another black tube, by which they can look straight into the inside of any man or woman to see if there is a bullet there and where it is located, so that these medicine-men of yours can get the bullet out without cutting open the wrong part of the body. More you have said. You have said that white men can talk to other white men who are *mil* and more *mil* miles away and they can talk to one another without shouting just the way as I talk to you now, and that they don't even need a copper wire on which their words run along, as do telegraph-wires in our country. I want you to talk right now and before my eyes to my woman, and tell her that I am hungry and that I've no tortillas and no frijoles to eat. And I want you to tell her to come right home, and that she has to come home on one of those air-wagons you have said your people ride on when they are in a hurry. And I am in an awful hurry now."

Having finished his speech with the difficulty an urchin has saying his catechism at Sunday school he began again swinging his machete pirate-fashion, obviously with the intention of making his demands more imperative.

What was I to do? If I got the better of him and clubbed him down, everybody in the village would accuse me of having killed a poor, ignorant, but honest Mexican peasant, who had done me no harm and had never meant to do me any, and who had not even insulted me, but had only come, a very humble human, to another human, asking for help which no good Christian would have denied him.

I had to do something to get me out of the hole I was in, and in which I did not feel very comfortable. As I was considered one of the greatest medicine-men, there remained nothing else for me to do but to rely on medicine. The only question was, what sort of medicine I was to use to cure myself of his desperation, and of his machete which, as he demonstrated over and over again, would cut a hair as if by magic. The medicine to be served had to be of a special kind — that is, it had to be effective enough to save both of us at the same time.

At this precious moment, when I was thinking which of the gods I might call upon for a good idea and a better medicine, there flashed through my tortured mind a mental picture of two black tubes sewn together in such a way that they might look like one.

"With your kind permission and just one minute," I said to him and went into my bungalow.

Out I came, carrying in my hands my modest fieldglass. I carried it be-

fore me with a great solemnity, as if it were the holiest object under heaven.

I stepped close to the fence where the Mexican stood, high expectancy in his eyes.

In a mumbled voice I now spoke to the glass, moving it at the same time around over my head, now to the left, now to the right, also moving it towards the man who was watching me with an ever-growing bewilderment.

Now I pressed the glass firmly to my eyes. I bent down and searched the ground while walking round and round, slowly lifting up the glass until it was at a level with the far horizon. For many minutes I scanned the horizon, searching every part of it while moving round in a circle. And I said, loud enough so that he would understand it: "*Donde estás, mujer?* Where are you, woman? Answer, or I'll make you by hell's or heaven's force!"

Another idea came to my mind at this minute. I whispered to him: "Where's the village you come from?"

He tried to answer. His excitement did not allow him to speak, though he had his mouth wide open. He swallowed several times and then pointed, with one arm only slightly raised towards north.

So I knew that I had to find his woman towards south to make my medicine work properly for his benefit and mine.

Now, all of a sudden, I yelled:

"I see her. *Ya la veo*. I see her. There she is now, at last. Poor woman. Oh, that poor, poor woman. A man beats her terribly. He has a black moustache, that man who beats her. I don't know who he is. I am sure I've seen him once or twice in this village here. Oh, that devil of a man, how he beats that poor woman. And she cries out loud: '*Ay mi hombre*, my dear husband, come, come quick and help me; fetch me away from that brute who has taken me by force and without my will; I want to come home and cook frijoles for you because I know you must be hungry after so much hard work in the bush; help me, help me, come quick!' That's what she cries. Oh, I can't stand it any longer; it's too terrible."

I was breathing heavily, as if entirely exhausted from the trance I had been in.

No sooner had I stopped and taken the glass off my eyes than the man, sweat all over his face, shouted as if going mad! "Didn't I tell you, señor? I knew all the time that it must be that dirty dog Pánfilo who has raped her. He has got a black moustache. I knew it all the time. He was after her since we came to this part. Always after her and always around the house whenever I was working in the bush. All the neighbors knew it because they told me so. I haven't sharpened my machete just for the fun of it. I knew that I would need a sharp edge somehow, somewhere and for someone,

to cut off his stinking head. Now I'll have to hurry to get her and get at the same time that Pánfilo cabron. Where is she, señor, quick, quick, pronto, pronto, say it. Ask her. Tell her that I'm on my way already."

I looked through my glass once more and mumbled something as if asking someone a few questions. Now I said: "She is *mil* miles away from here, your woman is. The man with the black moustache has carried her far away, I think with an air-wagon, perhaps. She says that she is in Naranjitos. That's way down in that direction." I pointed towards south-east. "It is only *mil* miles from here and along a trail not so very hard to go by."

"Well, then, señor mister, excuse me, but now I have got to hurry to fetch her and leave my marks on that Pánfilo dog."

He picked up his *morral*, a little bag, from the ground. It contained all he possessed on earth, a fact which made his life and his goings so easy, and it would have made him a truly happy man had it not been for women who would never be satisfied with such a little *bast* bag instead of some solid furniture or an electric refrigerator.

He became extremely restless now, so I thought it a good opportunity to give him another shot of the medicine. "Hustle, amigo, hurry up, or, dear God in heaven, you will miss her. And don't you dare stop on your way. You know it's more than *mil* days to walk. That rascal with

the black moustache is likely to carry her farther away still. You'd better go right now, this very minute."

"This certainly I will do, señor, since you say so. This very second I shall go. In fact, I'm running already." His feet were dancing about as if the ground consisted of embers. I knew that something still held him back, or he would have been a quarter of a mile off already.

It was his courtesy, the courtesy of the primitive man, that kept him still here. After a few wrong starts which seemed not to satisfy him, he at last found the right words. "Many, many thanks, señor, *mil, mil gracias* for your magnificent medicine." The word *magnífica* appeared to be one of the new words he had heard last night from the villagers, for he stumbled on it, although he would not lose the opportunity to use it for me. "The people in the village," he continued, "are right about you. Truly and verily you are a great medicine-man. You know all the hidden secrets of the world. You found her so quickly, much sooner than I could ever have expected. Of course, the two pesos and forty-six centavitos I promised you for your medicine, señor, I cannot pay now. I am very sorry for that. But you are a great doctor, surely you are, therefore you will understand that I cannot pay for the medicine now. You'll have to be satisfied with my thanks, which are honest by all means. You see,

señor mister, the money I need for my trip. That's why I cannot part with my money and pay you off. You surely will understand this easily since you're such a very wise man. Adió, señor, adió, and again *mil, mil gracias*."

And he was off like a hunted deer, without looking back. One minute later the bush had swallowed him up.

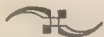
Never have I cheated a Mexican. I did not cheat that man either. The medicine I gave him is the best he could ever get. No other doctor would have prescribed him such a good medicine.

The village I named is about five hundred miles from here. He is without funds, save these two pesos and forty-six centavos. So he will have to walk the whole way. No hitch-hiking for him, because there is no highway. As there is no highway there cannot be motor-cars. Even if there were motor-cars none would pick him up. Latin-Americans are not dumb enough to pick up strangers parked along the highways.

It is an excellent medicine for him and for me. It saves me from the surprise of finding myself with my head chopped off. He is a strong and healthy fellow, and he is used to hard work. He won't go fifty miles, and he will find some work or a job. Or he will steal a stray cow and sell it to a butcher in one of the villages through which he passes. In the meantime, and more than a half-

dozen times, he will have had his belly filled with tortillas, frijoles, and green chile. His belly satisfactorily full, he will forget his grief. Once he has found some work, he will stay on in a village in the end. Once there, it won't be one week

before a woman will believe herself fairly lucky if allowed to cook frijoles and toast tortillas for him, and also hang her basket, or a sugar sack with her Sunday dress in it, at a peg inside the jacalito he will eventually, and quite predictably, occupy.



Merrill didn't realize how much Gladys meant to him — until after Gladys was dead.

BY JOHN M. SITAN



Accident

HIS FACE was flushed with anger as he watched her run from the café. The purse that she clutched claw-like by its strap thudded against the door frame and then she was

out of his view. Their argument had been hot and in low whispers and then she had begun crying. Her plate of the dinner they had ordered together was unfinished.

He turned back to the counter after a moment and lighted a cigarette. The cigarette was half gone

when a fat man excitedly rushed in the café. He did not turn to look at the interruption but frowned at the smoke spiraling upward from his cigarette.

His name was James Merrill and he was twenty-six years old. He was a small man with hair so blond it was almost white. His clothes were of the best quality, very expensive and very flashy. When he was fourteen years old his parents had died in a tenement fire. As he did not like his parents, their deaths had left no emotional scar on his mind.

When James Merrill finished his cigarette he waved for another cup of coffee. As he had been drinking his coffee he'd doodled on the back of the menu. His doodling consisted of angry zig-zags of lightning and then of the outlines of naked women with emphasized breasts and thighs. He printed the name Gladys in the four corners of the menu. Gladys was the name of the girl who had rushed from the café a few moments before.

When the coffee was gone James Merrill paid for both dinners and walked out of the side entrance of the café. He did not walk quickly.

James Merrill did not have a regular job. His source of income came from winnings at pool, at which he was expert, and errands he ran for the owner of several bookie establishments. He had known Gladys Mallahan for eight months and they had been living together since the third week of their meet-

ing. They were not married. Before his meeting with Gladys he had never been concerned with a girl except with her possession of adequate physical attributes. Though he quarrelled frequently with Gladys he had never left her. Their numerous reconciliations concluded blissfully in bed.

Gladys was nineteen and an orphan. She sometimes clerked in the bargain basement of a five-and-ten-cent store. She was dark, mildly pretty and not very intelligent. James Merrill was the third man she had lived with. The quarrel had been over a stockroom clerk James had seen Gladys talking to when he came to meet her after work. For the first time in any of their quarrels he had called Gladys a bitch. She had left the café crying.

At the corner down from the café he paused to light another cigarette. His and Gladys's apartment was two blocks further on. As he walked toward the apartment he stopped at a florist shop and bought carnations. As the clerk was making a bouquet of them he put another bill on the counter for a larger bouquet.

He was smiling when he unlocked the apartment door. He closed the door and called out Gladys's name. When there was no answer he looked into each room of the four-room apartment. Gladys had not come home.

The last room he entered was the apartment's tiny kitchen. He tore

the paper wrappings from the bouquet of carnations and put the bouquet in a pan he found in the cupboard. He got himself a drink and then filled the pan with water from the faucet. As he set the pan on the drain board he looked through the doorway into the living room. Gladys's favorite confession magazine was on the floor beside an easy chair where she had dropped it an hour before. He walked into the living room and picked up the magazine. He put it on the table under the window and sat down in the chair.

When the phone rang a half hour later he was standing impatiently by the window and looking down into the street to see if he could see Gladys returning to the apartment. A few moments before the phone had rung he had been walking up and down the room in irritation. His anger had been great enough so that he had torn Gladys' magazine jaggedly in half.

His voice was sharp as he answered the phone. Then he listened. He did not speak again. Finally the man on the other end of the line paused and he placed the receiver back in its cradle, missing the cradle in his first attempt. His hand went to the pack of cigarettes beside the phone. After he had put a cigarette in his mouth he forgot to light it.

The call had been from the police department. Gladys had been brought to the General Hospital an hour before. She had lived only a

short while after her arrival. The accident had happened when she had run from a café and out into the street from between two parked cars and been struck by an auto. The police had found the apartment address in her purse and wanted him to come down to the hospital immediately. The policeman on the phone had not finished speaking when James Merrill replaced the receiver in its cradle.

James Merrill did nothing for a quarter of an hour but sit in the chair beside the phone and stare at the wall. The unlit cigarette was still in his mouth. When he did move it was to the kitchen, where he took a half-full bottle of whiskey from a cabinet. He was about to close the cabinet door when he stopped. He took another bottle of whiskey from the cabinet and closed the door. Holding the bottles by their necks he went back into the living room and sat down in the easy chair. He was very calm and detached. The confession magazine Gladys had been reading, and which he had torn, was beside him on the floor.

When the landlady opened the door for the police checking on his unanswered telephone an hour and a half later he was on the floor on his hands and knees. Two whiskey bottles were empty beside him. A third was partially full and lying on its side, where a stain of whiskey spread about it. The smell of raw whiskey was sharp in the room.

Moving carefully on his hands and knees he was moving torn pieces of Gladys's magazine about. He had gotten a roll of scotch tape and, with great deliberation, was trying to fasten the pieces one to the other.

The inquest was held on a Saturday afternoon and was a leisurely ceremony in the basement of the city hall. A lawyer was present and said he represented Mary Lloyd. He requested that his client not be called to the stand as she had, previous to the accident, been under a doctor's care for nervous exhaustion and had been in a sanatorium only a month before. He stated that the accident had greatly upset her but that she was, however, in the corridor with her doctor if it was absolutely necessary she testify. The judge waived her appearance in the assembly room to give her testimony on the stand.

James Merrill had seen Mary Lloyd in the corridor. She was a tall, angular woman with a nervous twitch of her right eye. In the proceedings it was entered in the records that Mary Lloyd was a spinster and forty-two years old and lived off the proceeds of a trust fund left her by her father.

After the official procedures were taken care of it was established that Mary Lloyd could not have avoided hitting Gladys Mallahan and that the victim had appeared unexpectedly from between two cars. Two pedestrians on the street testified

that Gladys was crying and hysterical as she dashed into the street. James Merrill was not called to testify as he had not mentioned being with Gladys just before the accident. A verdict of accidental death was finally given. On her brief appearance for questioning Mary Lloyd had broken down and cried on the stand. She had blamed herself for the accident and wanted the police to arrest her. When she was led by her doctor to the judge's chambers she sobbed brokenly that she had not meant to kill the girl. Her doctor immediately prepared a hypodermic injection. An hour later she was taken home by the doctor.

It was late evening when James Merrill entered the apartment. He brought with him two quarts of whiskey. When he had put his coat away he sat down and opened one bottle. He took a long draught from it and then put it on the floor beside him. When he held it up a little later for another drink he stared at the bottle and then did not drink.

He sat in the chair for a long while until it became dark and the ceiling of the living room was flickering with the headlights of coming and going automobiles on the street below. When he felt hungry he went to the kitchen and ate three cold sausages and a piece of cheese that was in the ice box. He then went back to his chair and sat down. Finally he went into a fitful sleep.

When he awoke he looked at his luminous dial watch and saw that it was 1:30. He sat for a moment in the dark room and then suddenly covered his face with his hands and began to cry. He rolled to one side in the chair and rocked back and forth. Finally his sobs subsided and, his lips tight with grimness, he got up and went over to his telephone. The telephone book was open beside it where he had left it the day before. The telephone number of Mary Lloyd was underlined. He lifted the receiver and dialed the number. As he waited for the ringing phone to be answered his face worked and his throat tightened as if he would shout. When the phone was finally answered he could hear Mary Lloyd saying hello several times and asking who was calling. He opened his mouth to speak but could not. He began breathing in panting nervous gasps. The phone became silent but did not go dead. His breathing sounded loud in his own receiver. He heard a gasp and then Mary Lloyd's voice shrilly asking who it was.

He slowly took the receiver away from his ear and stared at it. Then trembling with resolve he finally whispered, "Killer," and again, "Killer." He dropped the receiver in its cradle.

James Merrill sat beside the phone for a long while. His eyes wandered to the still open telephone book. He then went into the bed room and set the alarm clock for one

o'clock in the morning. Stretching out on the bed without removing his clothes, he pulled a blanket over himself and went to sleep almost immediately.

It was dark when he awoke to the insistent ringing of the alarm clock. He pushed the button on the clock and stopped its ringing. Taking a cigarette from a pack beside the clock he clicked his lighter and, holding the flame to the tip of the cigarette, drew deeply. He then went over to the telephone and dialed Mary Lloyd's number. The telephone rang a number of times before it was answered. Mary Lloyd's voice came tinnily over the receiver as he puffed on the cigarette. He waited impassively. Then he said, "Killer," softly but distinctly and, "The police will want you yet." He replaced the receiver in its cradle. He called again at 3:00 and again at 5:30. He got his coat and combed his hair after the 5:30 call.

Forty-five minutes later he was standing on the opposite side of the street in front of Mary Lloyd's apartment house. A church was behind him. As it was Sunday morning no one stirred on the street. He stood for a while staring at the building front before finally crossing the street.

In the vestibule of the apartment house he checked for Mary Lloyd's flat and found it was 510, fifth floor front. He did not go upstairs, however, but down to the basement

garage. The parking spaces in the basement were tagged with plaques marking the name of the owner of the car. He stopped at the stall with Mary Lloyd's name. A 1941-model car was parked there. He looked at it silently. This was the car that had killed Gladys Mallahan. It took him only five minutes to damage the motor enough so that the car would have to be in a repair shop several days. His face was without emotion as he replaced the hood. Before leaving he spelled out *Killer* in the dust on both doors.

Upstairs on the fifth floor he walked quietly. He quickly found the door to Mary Lloyd's apartment. Taking a notebook from his coat pocket he tore out a page and penciled, *the police will want you — don't try to run*. As he slipped the note under the door he heard a sound from the other side of the door. The sound was a thumping as if a person had fainted and slumped to the floor. He stood for a moment longer and then turned and walked down the corridor.

A flight of steps led up to the entrance of the church across the street from Mary Lloyd's apartment. He sat on the top step and did not move. A public phone booth was recessed in a niche on the side of the stairway. After an hour he made a telephone call to Mary Lloyd's apartment. The phone was answered immediately. He did not speak as frenzied words came from the receiver but quietly hung up.

The two fronting windows of Mary Lloyd's apartment had drawn blinds. One of the blinds went up and he saw Mary Lloyd looking down into the street. He did not move as her gaze settled on him. She drew back from the window suddenly and he saw her pull at the window shade to again cover the window. Her motion was erratic and violent and the shade broke. It dangled by one end across the window but did not obscure it.

James Merrill continued to wait.

A cruising police prowl car came by and James Merrill watched it with calm implacability. It passed and did not stop. When it was gone he lighted a cigarette. After a while he made another phone call. This time the phone was not answered. He let it ring for a long time and then hung up. When a half hour had passed he rang again and let the phone ring twice and then pulled the receiver down. He held it a moment and dialed again. He did this once more and then left the telephone booth and walked across to the apartment building. He entered through the basement garage door that had been opened a few minutes earlier by the janitor. The left hand door of Mary Lloyd's car was open. A dust smeared handkerchief was on the garage floor. The spelled word *Killer* had been rubbed out.

He was not quiet this time as he walked up the corridor and stopped before her door. He listened

a moment but heard only a faint stirring noise as if someone were listening on the other side of the door. He penciled another note, *the window — jump*, and slid it under the door. He went back to the steps of the church and waited. People were now entering the church for early services. After glancing at his watch several times he made another telephone call. His voice was harsh as he said, "Jump."

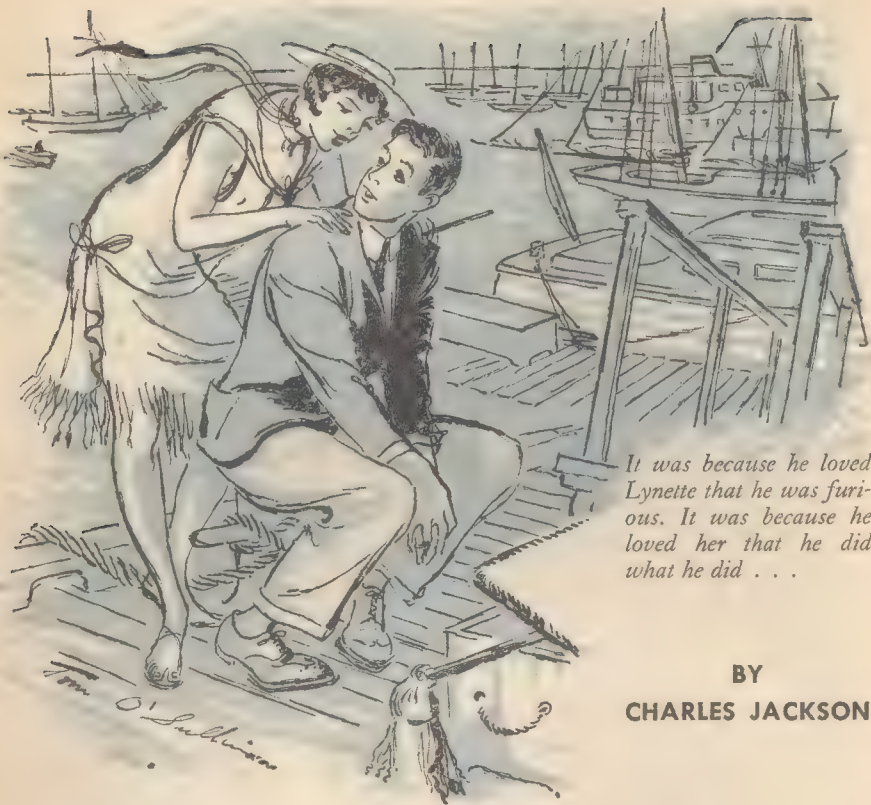
It was ten o'clock when he tele-

phoned again. He let the telephone ring until it was answered. He said only the one word, "Jump." He called again after five minutes and then called again and yet again.

He was going into the phone booth once more when Mary Lloyd threw the window of her apartment up.

As he watched she pushed her legs out and then was sitting on the window ledge. Her dress bunched up around her thighs. When she jumped she fell head foremost.





It was because he loved Lynette that he was furious. It was because he loved her that he did what he did . . .

BY
CHARLES JACKSON

I Don't Fool Around

TONIGHT Lynette McCaffrey was wearing a short red skirt that seemed all torn and jagged around the edge, like fringe; and when George Burton, watching through the open window, looked more carefully, he saw that it was fringe.

Above the skirt was a thin blouse that you could see through, and above that, a small close-fitting hat of silver straw, with her brown curls bunched out below the curling brim. On her feet were flat sandals, the kind that children used to wear.

He had never seen a fringed skirt before, or sandals on a girl her age, or a hat at the Yacht Club dance. As if her beauty alone was not enough to set her apart, it was like Lynette McCaffrey to wear something different, to create a new style, to get herself looked at and talked about. George Burton followed her around the floor with his eyes, and hoped that it was love.

The small orchestra from the city was playing *Hindustan* and she was dancing with Arthur Wallace again. Art had on white flannels and a blue double-breasted jacket with shining brass-buttons. The flannels were certainly his own, because he had been wearing them all summer long at the Saturday night dances. George Burton said aloud, "Damn Dad anyway," feeling a momentary burst of anger that frightened him.

He looked around quickly to see if anybody had heard. There was no one. He was alone on the raised edge of weather-beaten planks that ran alongside the Clubhouse to the broad pier fronting the bay. But if his father had only let him borrow his white flannels, which fitted perfectly all right if he tightened the belt enough, he might have had a chance with a girl like Lynette McCaffrey.

The music ended with a matched crescendo of piano and banjo, and Lynette and Art strolled from the floor toward the open doors at the bay end. She did not applaud, as the other girls did, and when Art Wal-

lace saw how indifferent she was, he arrested his palms in midair and didn't applaud either. She reached into a side pocket of Art's jacket and drew out a pack of cigarettes. Right in front of everybody she put one in her mouth and tilted her face up for a light. Then, with the cigarette hanging from her lip in the most wonderful way, she passed through the doors and out to the pier.

George Burton had never felt so lonely, but he was not, except for one brief moment, really unhappy. He loved from afar, and merely to look on was enough. In fact he was almost happy. He waited for, and appreciated, each new feeling of exaltation; and when these came, he felt a strong new sense of being older, aware that he was experiencing himself in a way that he never had before. But Lynette was out of sight now, so after another minute he moved along the raised beam toward the open pier.

It was a marvelous August night, cool and clear, and there was a yellow moon hanging over the bluff at the far end of the bay, right over that part of the Bluff where his parents' cottage was. He heard the wash and slap of the small waves against the pilings beneath the wharf, and he saw the gently swaying night lights, and their bobbing reflections, on the sailboats anchored offshore. Several couples stood around in the light that streamed from the Clubhouse, waiting for the band to start up again.

Then he found Lynette McCaffrey.

She was seated on the flat top of one of the low iron posts at the edge of the pier. Four or five fellows hovered about her admiringly, but George knew they were thinking far more of themselves and the figures they cut than they were of her; not one of them could begin to appreciate how marvelous she was. He edged closer to listen, but not near enough, he thought, to be seen. He heard her say, "Just look at that moon." Then, in the most matter-of-fact tone, as if she had been merely commenting on the weather, she added: "It's as yellow as piss" — and George Burton fell in love for good and all.

Lynette McCaffrey was the new girl that summer. Her family was from Cleveland, and she not only thought, but said openly, that Parsons Point was dead. What on earth was there to do in a dump like this, why didn't somebody put some life in the old place, where were all the mean men? — things like that. It had never occurred to George Burton before that the Point was dead, but he accepted the idea at once. Well, not really. It was dead for her — how could it help being? — but with a girl like Lynette McCaffrey around, it was far from dead for him.

For almost a month, now, every single day had been different, and better, than last year, because of the certainty and promise that sometime or other before nightfall, he

would run into Lynette McCaffrey not once or twice but several times: sailing on the bay, having a soda at Mike's, climbing the steep path to her cottage on the Bluff (and not leaning forward in the effort, as nearly everybody else did), sunning herself in a yellow or red or green bathing suit on the pier where the *Wrinkle* came in (actually swimming was for kids), or, dressed in a fresh new frock in the late afternoon, sauntering down to the post office below the Bluff to get the evening mail. When they met, he always waited for her to speak first, and she always did. "Hi, Georgie," she said, in the most democratic fashion. He hated being called Georgie by anybody, but when she said it, somehow it became her own special name for him, private and intimate as if it were something between them, a kind of secret that was his and hers together.

George Burton was going on seventeen, and he had heard that Lynette was almost two years older. But because he was as tall and nearly as grown-up looking as she was, he hoped nobody had told her how young he was. The fellows she hung around with were all her own age and pretty sophisticated, which was why he didn't like to talk with her in their presence — their snappy line always showed him up — and this was also why he avoided joining the little group around her now. But suddenly, to his astonishment, thrill, and a funny feeling in his

stomach something like stage fright, Lynette called out to him in the dark: "Why Georgie Burton, what are you doing skulking around in the shadows like a — like I don't know what?" And while the fellows laughed, she added: "Come on over here where you belong!"

It was wonderful. Lynette McCaffrey had said it herself; and as he went over and stood beside her, he felt that maybe he did belong. Then the music started up, Lynette reached out a hand toward Hank Van Duser, and let herself be pulled to her feet. "I promised Van this one, but Georgie, will you dance the next one with me? I haven't danced with you once all summer. Not once! Here, take my cigarette . . ." George Burton took her cigarette between thumb and forefinger and Lynette moved off toward the lighted dance floor arm in arm with Van.

The small orchestra was playing *Oh Gee, Say Gee*, and George stood there on the dark wharf holding the cigarette. Everybody else had gone in. He looked at the cigarette. It was a gold-tipped Violet Milo rapidly getting shorter and shorter, now, as it burned down to the end. In a few seconds he would have to throw it away, and he didn't want to do that. Of course he didn't expect it to last all through the dance, till Lynette and Hank came back out again, but he wanted to keep it as long as he could. Finally he held it up to his lips, took a small short

puff, then dropped it over the side of the pier into the water. Because of the music, he did not hear the tiny hiss it must have made as it hit the water.

The moon, rising higher over the Bluff at the far end of the bay, was getting smaller now, and it was also paler, whiter, no longer the color that Lynette had said it was — said in a way that nobody else on earth, certainly no other girl, would have described it. Her word had almost taken his breath away, but it had been exactly right, and he was filled with admiration for her originality and daring. The thought of dancing with her, actually holding her in his arms at last, right in front of all the other fellows, was a thought almost too much to bear; and he hoped he could bring it off in a casual fashion, or at least that it would look that way.

He stood there listening, waiting, and now the piano was going it alone, accompanied for the moment only by the drummer, who slapped the big drum softly with a pair of wire flyswatters which gave off a whispering, swishing sound, just right for the piano solo. He looked through the open door into the brightly-lighted Clubhouse and saw Lynette, her head in its silver straw bonnet resting on Hank Van Duser's shoulder, gazing up into Van's face as they moved slowly around the floor. He could have watched her forever. It was almost as good as the dream that was to be realized any minute now.

The tune came to an end and Van and Lynette and a bunch of others sauntered out onto the dark pier again.

She looked for and found him sitting on the iron post where she had sat. She came up to him at once and placed her two hands on his shoulders in the friendliest, the most affectionate gesture in the world. His heart swelled with pride as he saw how the other fellows noticed. She said, her voice a breathless thrilling stage-whisper, so personal, so intimate, almost like a kind of love-making: "Georgie honey, I've made a ghastly mistake. I could simply kill myself. Van reminded me that I promised the next dance to that fool of a Freddie Vincent, and then after that it's Art Wallace again, and then Van, and — that's the way it goes, kid. So listen, honey, why don't we do this? Next Saturday night I promise to save you two dances for just you and me alone. I'm just as sorry as I can be, I'm simply crushed and heartbroken. But I'll make it up to you next time, Georgie, honest and true."

The word *honey* struck him to the heart, but he said, "Why sure, that's okay, I understand, don't give it another thought." He avoided looking at the other fellows standing around, and concentrated on Lynette's face alone, giving her a smile that he hoped looked all right and that she could see, and the others could see too, in the half-dark of the wharf. Immediately, then, Lynette fell into

an animated conversation with the fellows standing around, and he heard her make fun of that silly little orchestra from the so-called city — ("Do they actually have the gall to call themselves a *dance* orchestra, and my word, why don't they play something that isn't about a thousand years old!") — and he heard the fellows laugh. It was so like Lynette; it was all part of that wonderful outside world she came from, the great world of the future, far away from Arcadia and Parsons Point.

There was more than two hours to wait before the dance would be over at twelve and the *Wrinkle* would take them back home across the bay to the Bluff. When Freddie Vincent came and took her off to the dance floor, George Burton got up and went back along the weather-beaten planks beside the Clubhouse to the dirt road in back. He walked slowly down the dark lane to the brightly-lighted street where the bowling alley was, and the hot dog stand and the cheap dance hall that the nicer people didn't go to. He bought himself a hot dog and stood outside the dance hall looking in. It was one of those ten-cents-a-dance places, where you could go, girls as well as men, without escorts or a proper date. He watched the couples toddling around the floor. Some of the girls were pretty enough, but they were working girls for the most part, and there wasn't one of them in the whole place who had what

Lynette McCaffrey had. What that was, he couldn't have said. It was a mysterious something that he had never before found in anyone else, and he knew it was love, all the more so because of his hurt.

Keenly he felt his unhappiness, and he knew that all these strangers in the street, all these callous people who never felt anything, could not possibly know what he was feeling, or, if they did know, understand. It was something he himself had not felt before, ever, and he believed that there could not be many others in this world who had ever felt it, either. It was special and delicious and painful all at once, he knew that it set him apart, and he felt both lonelier and bigger, more capable of feelings, than anybody else had ever felt.

It was life, in short. Oh, there was no fun in being so vulnerable, so much more sensitive than other fellows, but wasn't that part of love, didn't it go with falling in love, could a man have one without the other — didn't it come from being more aware and susceptible to life than the common herd? He turned away from the dancing gay throng so ignorant of the deeper finer things, and wandered off alone toward the upper end of the Point, hugging his misery to himself . . .

Finally he heard the three deep notes of the *Wrinkle* whistle, which meant that the boat was leaving for the Bluff in five minutes. He hurried back.

The lights on the pier had been turned on, and a dozen or more couples who had been at the Yacht Club dance were crowding around for the trip home. The *Wrinkle* was a small narrow steamer, hardly bigger than a big launch, with a brightly-lighted cabin lined on both sides with a continuous leather-cushioned bench and an open deck above with a single bench athwart the steamer just in front of the small glassed-in place where the pilot stood at the wheel. By the time the final whistle blew, everybody was on board, the engines started up with a deep whine, the propeller churned the water at the stern into a noisy swirling foam, and they were off.

Lynette McCaffrey, her legs crossed and one sandalled foot swinging, sat between Art Wallace and Hank Van Duser. She was smoking a cigarette against all the rules of the *Wrinkle*; while the engines were in motion, smoking was not even permitted on the upper deck, much less inside in the cabin. Blowing directly onto their backs and necks, a chill wind streamed into the open windows as the boat gathered speed, colder in a way, because nobody was dressed for it, than a winter wind — the kind of chill wind that blows across the water on a summer midnight. Some of the girls huddled against their partners' shoulders, and the fellows put their arms around them. There was a great deal of laughter and lively talk, tossed back and forth among

the passengers, but it all rang hollow and false in George Burton's ear. Feeling out of it, wanting to be alone, he got up and turned toward the ladder-like steps that went up to the open deck above. Just as he began the climb, Lynette called out:

"Georgie! Don't go up there, kid. You're probably all sweaty after the dance and you'll catch your death."

"I'll be all right," he answered casually over his shoulder, and disappeared above.

He sat down on the bench in front of the pilot's cabin and folded his arms. It was wonderful the way she had said "sweaty"; every single one of the silly girls he knew would have said "perspiration." He was not a bit sweaty, of course, because he had not danced a single dance; but all the same, in a minute or two he began to be very cold. He sat there in the night wind shivering as if with a chill, and he thought of what Lynette had said about catching his death. He hoped he would. She had warned him, and he had ignored her warning. He hoped she would remember this, a few days from now, and remember, too, how he had gone up to the upper deck just the same, as if he just didn't care . . .

The *Wrinkle* was out in the middle of the bay now, and he saw the lights on Garfield and Cedar Island far off on one side, and a few lights still showing in the long row of cottages that lined the narrow sand bar between the bay and Lake Ontario. The bar shone palely in the moon-

light, outlined against the expanse of the lake beyond, bright and wide in the moonlight like the open sea; it was like a reef or magic atoll of the South Seas, and he murmured: "Yon palm-fringed incandescent coast . . ." The bar was only a piddling strip of gravelly sand strung with a lot of cheesy shacks that passed for cottages and a few moth-eaten cottonwood trees, but the effect was all right . . .

They'll be sorry, he said to himself, a few days from now or next week, maybe, when he didn't turn up at the dance — though of course the news would get around long before then. They'd remember a lot of things about him and tell each other that he was a pretty darn nice guy after all and wish they had paid more attention to him while they had the chance. At the end of the season Lynette McCaffrey would go home to her set in Cleveland and tell them all that though Parsons Point was just a dump where there was nothing to do at all, where you simply went crazy sitting around all day doing nothing, there was one of the most wonderful fellows there that she had ever known in her life and before she got a chance to know him very well, the most terrible thing happened — it had plunged the whole place into the most awful gloom. . . . He gazed across the dark racing waters of the bay and thought: Next week all this will be the same, all this will be here, and I will not . . .

When the *Wrinkle* pulled in at the wharf below the Bluff and they all piled out, he waited till the last passenger had left the cabin before he climbed down the ladder and got off. In the moonlit dark he heard the cries of "So long" and "See you tomorrow" as the group broke up and the fellows took home their dates. Then he started up the steep path of the Bluff alone, careful to hang back so that he would not overtake those who were walking slowly on, arm linked in arm, ahead of him.

He came in through the back door of his parents' cottage and reached overhead for the string of the kitchen light. By now he really was sweaty, his shirt was sticking to his back under the tweed jacket, and he was chilled through and through. On the white oilcloth of the table he found a note in pencil from his mother, written on one of those oblong cards found in Shredded Wheat packages and held down by a saltcellar so that it wouldn't blow away in the breeze that came in strong through the screen door:

"Be sure and empty the ice pan and this time *don't forget!!!*"

He smiled sadly to himself. What did his mother know — what did anybody know — of what had been happening to him this night, what he had been through and what he was feeling in his heart . . .

When he went out to his cot on the sleeping porch, which was open on three sides to the cold night breeze, he found that his mother

had left his pajamas for him beside the pillow and turned the blankets down, ready for him to get in. An idea came to him. He stripped off the blankets and even the sheet, rolled them up in a great bundle and fired them into a corner of the porch; then he fired his pajamas after them. He would sleep raw tonight and really catch that death, just as Lynette McCaffrey had said he would. He started taking off his clothes.

But when he got down to his B.V.D.'s, it occurred to him that maybe it wasn't nice to go to bed naked, not when he was in love. If it had been just any old tramp, that would have been a different thing; but if he was going to do this because of a girl like Lynette McCaffrey, it wouldn't be quite decent for them to find him in the morning lying there without a stitch on. He got on the bed in his underwear and lay flat on his back with his arms folded under his head and gazed off into the freezing night. He made every effort to lie rigid and stiff as a ramrod but it was difficult, because his body was shaken again and again by shudders of chill. But he refused to accept his physical feelings; he recognized only feelings far different, deeper, and truer. He had heard about mind-over-matter and he concentrated intensely on his emotion and his thoughts. Now another line of poetry sprang unpremeditated into his head and with a melancholy satisfaction he thought it was the

most wonderful thing that had ever been thought or said in the world — why, it was as if it had been written for him alone:

“Now more than ever seems it rich to die,

To cease upon the midnight with no pain . . .”

Suddenly he was wakened out of a deep sleep by a violent shaking that was not of the cold. He rolled over and sat up, startled. His mother stood there beside the cot, her hand on his shoulder, scolding him unmercifully.

“George Burton, are you out of your mind! What’s the big idea of going to bed on a night like this without a blanket over you or even a *sheet*, for heaven’s sakes? And my stars, sleeping in your underwear — are you crazy?” Scolding away, she fished up the roll of blankets and sheet from the corner of the porch, shook them out and spread them over his cot, tucking him carefully in on all sides. He didn’t say a word to her but he was very grateful and surprised at himself all the same, as he was just about dying of the cold and he didn’t think he could stand it another minute.

“Goodness knows how long

you’ve been lying there exposed to the world like that — do you realize it’s after two o’clock in the morning? Good thing for you, young man, that I got up to see if you were in! Really, George Burton, you’re simply not to be trusted at all . . .”

When she had gone back to her own room, he lay there with the blankets wrapped up tight and warm around his neck. He was asleep before he had time to think, almost before he had time to realize that above every other person on earth he hated Lynette McCaffrey . . .

In the morning he knew he would find her sunning, alone, on the pier. There was a small spur of pride in him as he told himself how he had finally seen through her. He was sure now that she had led him on, and that she had nearly made him kill himself.

“. . . To cease upon the midnight with no pain,” he quoted to himself again. But it would be broad daylight now, and he didn’t suppose it would be absolutely painless . . .

He went up to meet Lynette McCaffrey with no weapon but his hands, and he didn’t even give a thought to what must inevitably come after.



What's Your Verdict?

No. 1 — The Cooperative Corpse

BY SAM ROSS

PROBABLY the strangest thing of all about the Maitland murder was the fact that the victim herself did her best to fool and confuse the police.

The victim's name was Emily Maitland, and she was an old woman with an awful lot of money and not such an awful lot of sense. She had a nephew who was a petty punk, and, in addition to giving him a few bucks here and a few bucks there whenever he asked for money, she put temptation in his path by naming him in her will to the tune of several hundred thousand dollars. He did the obvious thing. He decided there was no point in waiting until she obliged him by dying a natural death, so he rigged a phony burglary to make it appear that the old lady had surprised the thief and been plugged for her efforts, and he put a couple of bullets into Emily Maitland's head.

The thing would have been open and shut under ordinary circumstances, because the police can always turn up a mistake or two when an amateur tries something fancy like this, but, as stated, it was the

old lady herself who threw a monkey-wrench. A servant found her and called the police, and she wasn't quite dead when the police arrived — so, naturally, they asked her who had done it.

"It was a burglar — a man after my silver," Emily said. "He was a tall man, over six feet, and he had black hair and dark skin." She said that, and she died.

Emily's nephew, Arnold Harris, was slight, fair-skinned, and he had blond hair.

It wasn't that the old lady was in delirium, or mistaken, or anything of that sort, and it wasn't that she hadn't seen her murderer. She'd whirled and stared at Arnold just as he fired at her, so she knew the score absolutely and positively. The fact is that she had something else in mind . . .

Arnold, who'd acquired very little other than wrong-guess horserace stubs in his lifetime, had recently acquired one much more interesting possession: a wife named Laura, who was twenty-two and a very lovely chick indeed. Furthermore, she was well brought up and gentle and

well-mannered, and Emily liked her very much; even more, incredibly enough, than Emily had liked Arnold up to the time she'd turned and seen him pointing a gun at her.

Emily's reasoning, then, went along these lines: She had no other relatives, and, though Arnold had turned out to be a louse, Arnold's lovely wife should not be made to know what as a result of it. Therefore, though Arnold was a murderer, let him remain free and use her money, since lovely Laura would also benefit therefrom. And if, through some unlikely chance, Arnold should be found out and arrested, Laura would still inherit the money.

As mentioned, Emily just wasn't very bright. It never occurred to her at all that Laura might possibly be a cold, deadly babe underneath the manners, and might even have egged on and convinced Arnold to speed the old lady along.

From the first look the police got at the case, it smelled a hell of a lot like Arnold and spouse, but they were, naturally, more than a little perplexed by the old lady's own dying statement. So they left Arnold and Laura alone, and began technical and routine investigation.

It wasn't hard. There were a couple of lakes within a mile of the estate, and they dredged both and found the murder gun in the second one. It was an unregistered rod, but they checked the various pawnbrokers in town, found one guy who

looked nervous and took him downtown, and sweated a statement out of him. He'd sold the gun to Arnold, and had accepted a couple of C's and agreed not to record the sale or worry about Arnold's lack of license to own a gun.

So they took Arnold downtown and sweated *him*. Arnold was soft. It didn't take much sweating.

Arnold confessed the whole thing, and implicated Laura. Several months later they were convicted.

The day after their conviction, Arnold made a statement which caused considerable argument among the reporters who overheard it. "Well," he said, wryly, "I'd better sit down and figure out where I'll will my aunt's money. Looks like I won't be getting much use out of it."

The argument, of course, revolved around whether or not Arnold *would* get his aunt's money. One reporter said he would get it because he was the heir named in Emily Maitland's last will and testament; another said he would not normally get it despite the will and testament, but would get it in this case because that was also Laura's dying wish; a third said that he would not inherit the money.

What's *your* verdict?

ANSWER

Arnold had no reason to worry about wills, since he would not receive Laura's money. A convicted murderer may not inherit his victim's money, regardless of the victim's will or wishes.

Frame

Liddell had it all figured out. But the way it added up, there was only one possible killer: Johnny Liddell.

A Johnny Liddell Novelette



BY FRANK KANE

THE PHONE on the night table started to ring shrilly, discordantly. Johnny Liddell groaned, cursed softly, dug his head into the pillow, but the noise refused to go away. He opened one eye experimentally, peered at the half lowered shade and noted that it was still dark.

He tried to wipe the sleep from his eyes, but it wouldn't wipe away. The phone kept ringing. Finally, he reached out and lifted the receiver off its hook.

"Yeah?" he growled sleepily.

"This is Laury Lane. Come out here right away. That man of yours

is going crazy and —” The voice was drowned out by the flat, ugly bark of a shot. The line went dead.

Liddell was suddenly wide awake. And ice cold. He started to jiggle the cross bar on the phone. “Hello. Hello.” The only answer was the soft click of a phone being hung up at the other end.

Liddell continued to jiggle the cross bar. The metallic voice of the operator cut in: “What number are you calling?”

“I’m not calling a number. Somebody was calling me. We’ve been cut off. Can you get them back?”

“I must have the number.”

Liddell growled deep in his chest. “Never mind, thanks. They’ll probably call back.” He tossed the receiver back on its hook, started stuffing his legs into his trousers. He headed for the bathroom, completed the waking-up process by splashing ice cold water into his face, then finished dressing. He shrugged into a shoulder harness, clipped his .45 into place, covering it with a jacket. He was headed for his garage less than ten minutes after the phone had started to ring.

2.

Laury Lane lived in a small colony of two-acre plot estates just outside of Sands Point on Long Island’s North Shore. Johnny Liddell headed out Northern Boulevard, making the forty-minute ride in something short of a half hour.

The house itself was set back from the highway and shielded from the road by a row of evergreens. Liddell swung through the stone pillars that supported a rarely-closed iron gate, followed the short winding driveway to the house. There were two other cars parked in front of the garage, on the concrete apron. Liddell left his in front of the house, walked up the two steps to the door.

There were no lights in the hall, but he could see a triangle of yellow light toward the back of the house where it spilled from an open door. He debated the advisability of walking around back, decided to knock.

Almost immediately the door opened and he could make out the bulky figure of a man silhouetted in the opening.

“I’m Johnny Liddell. I want to see Miss Lane.”

The door opened wider. “Come on in.” The man stepped aside, waited until Liddell had entered, fell in behind him. “Straight ahead to the study.”

Liddell followed the darkened hallway to the open door. He stopped at the entrance to the room and looked around. Two men looked at him incuriously. One of them, a tall man in a rumpled blue suit and a battered fedora, grunted, “Who’s this, Allen?”

“Name’s Liddell. Says he wants to see Miss Lane.”

“Be my guest,” the man in the rumpled suit grunted. He walked over to where a blanket was draped

over a suggestively shaped bulge, pulled it back.

Laury Lane lay on her back, her arm crooked languidly over her head. Her thick blonde hair was a tangle on the thick pile of the rug. Her green eyes were half closed. Her lips, full and inviting, seemed set in a half smile. A hole midway between her full breasts had spilled an ugly red stain on the white silk of her evening gown.

The man in the blue suit watched the scowl ridge Liddell's forehead. He dropped the blanket back over the girl's face. "You say you're Liddell?"

The private detective nodded, dug into his pocket, brought out a pack of cigarettes and held it up for approval. When the lieutenant nodded, he stuck one in the corner of his mouth where it wagged. "I'm Liddell. Who're you?"

The man in the blue suit pinched at his nostrils with thumb and forefinger. "Murray. Lieutenant in homicide out here. Mind telling me what brings you out this way at this hour?"

"Lane was a client. She wanted to see me."

Murray pursed his lips, considered it. He tugged a dog-eared memo book from his hip pocket, jotted down some notes. "So you just drop by at —" He pushed up his sleeve, consulted his wrist watch — "at two o'clock in the morning?" His eyes rolled up from the notebook to Liddell's face. "Keep kind

of late office hours, don't you?"

"Something had happened. She called me to get right out here. Something she wanted to talk to me about."

The homicide man wet the point of his pencil on the tip of his tongue. "What was it that couldn't wait?"

Liddell shrugged. "She didn't say."

"Maybe we can tell you," Murray grunted. He led the way to the french doors that opened onto the back patio. "Put some light out here, Al," he snapped at one of the other men.

Liddell followed him, stared down at the body of a man, sprawled face down on the patio. He knelt beside the body, lifted the hat off its face, swore under his breath.

"Know him?" Murray wanted to know.

Liddell nodded grimly. "One of my boys. Name's Tate Morrow."

"Have you any idea what he was doing out here, or is it customary with your organization to make late calls on clients?"

"Tate was assigned to Lane. He was bodyguarding her." He straightened up, brushed the folds out of his knees. "Any idea of what happened?"

Murray grinned humorlessly. "We thought you might have some idea. Busting out here this way."

Liddell shook his head. "No ideas." He took a deep drag on his cigarette, wrinkled his nose in distaste, dropped the cigarette to the

patio floor, ground it out. "Could be that Tate heard the shot that got the blonde, came running, and —"

The homicide man snorted. "Why don't you start levelling? You can see he was headed away from her, not toward her." He jabbed his hand into his jacket pocket, brought up a small gun, wrapped in a handkerchief. "This was lying right next to her hand. It's got one bullet fired." His eyes were bleak, unfriendly. "My guess is that the one in his back will match it."

"That's crazy and you know it. Why should Lane shoot the guy who was protecting her? And if she did, who shot her?"

"He did," Murray snapped. "Show him, Al."

The other detective walked over, spilled the contents of an envelope into the palm of his hand, held them toward Liddell. "Diamonds. We found them right near his hand, where he dropped them when he fell." Murray turned his back, walked into the den. "That's the way we see it," he said flatly.

"That's the way you're supposed to see it. It's a set-up, can't you see?" Liddell argued. "You think that babe could get a gun, aim it and bring him down with one shot when she's wearing a .45 slug for a lavalier?" He caught the homicide man by the arm, swung him around. "That babe was deader than Kelsey the minute that slug tagged her. And my guess is that Tate was dead before that."

Murray caught the private detective's hand, lifted it from his arm. "Why should anybody go to all that trouble?"

"The diamonds," Liddell snapped.

"And then leave without them?" Murray shook his head. "You're not making sense."

"You're making less. You don't think that handful of little stones is what Tate was guarding, do you? Lane had over \$150,000 worth of unset stones. Where are they?"

The homicide lieutenant looked thoughtful, plucked at his lower lip. "That's the first I hear of this. Fill me in."

Liddell found another cigarette, lit it. "Lane was getting ready to retire. Did you know that?"

Murray shook his head, nodded for one of his men to answer a ring at the front door. "I don't know much about the theatrical crowd. All I know I read in the columns. I thought she was a big star?"

Liddell shrugged. "She's had her day. But she's been fading fast for the past couple of years. This year she decided to go back home. She was British, you know."

"Excuse me." Murray went over to the door to shake hands with a small man carrying a brown instrument case. They carried on a whispered conversation for a few minutes; then the newcomer went over and pulled the blanket back from the dead woman. Murray walked over to where Liddell was standing. "The medical examiner," he ex-

plained. "So she was going back to Britain. So?"

"She was turning everything she had into cash." Liddell took the cigarette from between his lips, scowled at the glowing end. "For years she's been collecting diamonds. They're easier to hide, and the Treasury boys can't put them onto an adding machine like they can the contents of a safe deposit box." He took a last drag on the cigarette, stubbed it out in an ash tray. "She hired us to keep an eye on her until she turned the stones into cash."

Two men from the M.E.'s office brought in a stretcher. Liddell broke off and watched glumly as they transferred the blonde to the stretcher, strapped her on.

"Whoever killed her knew about the stones. So he tried to make it look as though Tate did the job."

"Could be," Murray agreed.

"You've got other ideas?" Liddell wanted to know.

The homicide man shrugged. "Just ideas, so far. No proof." He reached over, picked a thread off Liddell's jacket and let it float to the ground. "Suppose your boy here did stop one, but his confederate managed to get away with the bulk of it?" He looked Liddell in the eye. "Who knew about the diamonds?"

Liddell scowled. Hard lines joined his nostrils with the end of his mouth, hard lumps formed on his jaw as he clenched his teeth. "Mike Murphy, Lane's personal manager,

for one. It was his idea to hire the agency because the stuff wasn't insured."

"Who else?"

Liddell studied the homicide man's face carefully. "Louis Arms. He was supposed to be the buyer."

"Arms, eh?" Murray raised his eyebrows, pursed his lips. "Anybody else?"

Liddell shrugged angrily. "Not that I know of. Not unless they spread it around."

"Think they were likely to?" Murray sneered.

"No."

The homicide man nodded. "Then that leaves just you and your boy, Liddell." He jabbed his pencil at the private detective. "But you can undoubtedly tell us where you were all evening?"

"In bed."

"Witnesses?"

"This happened to be my off night. I was in bed alone."

Murray squinted, plucked at his lower lip. "But you got a phone call from the Lane girl and she told you to get right out here?"

Liddell nodded. "That's right."

The homicide man walked over to the desk in the corner of the room, lifted the telephone from its cradle. "We don't have dials out here yet, you know. Pretty small time stuff to a big operator like you, I guess." He turned his attention to the phone. "Millie? Ed Murray from Homicide. Say, about an hour ago, do you remember a call Laury

Lane made to New York? Number was —” He raised his eyebrows at Liddell.

“Homeyer 5-7236,” Liddell grunted.

“Number was Homeyer 5-7236.” He waited a moment, then pursed his lips, looked at Liddell from under lowered lids. “You’re sure of that?” He nodded, dropped the receiver on its hook. “There haven’t been any calls from this number to a New York number tonight.”

“Maybe I got the message by ouija board,” Liddell growled.

“Maybe you didn’t get the message.”

“Let me get this straight, Murray. You’re trying to say that I didn’t get a call from Lane, that I came out here to meet Tate and cut up the dame’s diamonds. Then what happened to them?”

Murray grinned bleakly. “Maybe this isn’t the first time you came out tonight. Maybe you got here right after the shooting, picked up as much of the loot as you could find in the dark, hit back to town, stashed it and then came back to put on this injured innocence act.”

“That’s how it is, eh?”

Murray nodded. “That’s how it is. What are you going to do about it?”

“You mean I’ve got a choice? I’m going to find the real killer and hand him to you on a silver platter. You don’t have to worry, though, I’ll label him for you so you’ll know him when you fall over him.”

“And if I decide to take you in and book you?”

“On what? There’s not a judge in the county would hold me on your pipe dream. It’s like you said, you haven’t got a thing but an idea — a screwy idea. I’ll be around if you want to talk to me.”

3.

Mike Murphy lived in the Livermore Arms, an expensive pile of mortar and plate glass overlooking the East River at Beekman Place. Johnny Liddell parked his car out front, plowed across the deep pile rug in the ornate lobby to the desk. A white-haired man in an oxford grey suit with a wing collar made a half-hearted attempt to wipe the boredom out of his eyes as Liddell approached, but didn’t quite make it. His teeth were too shiny and too even to be real and Liddell had a passing suspicion about the color in his cheeks.

“Can I help you?” His fingers toyed with the triangle of white linen that peeped from his breast pocket.

“Will you ring Mike Murphy’s apartment? Tell him Johnny Liddell must see him immediately.”

“Certainly, sir.” The white-haired man sat down at a small switchboard, plugged in one of the wires. He licked at his lips before he spoke into the mouthpiece, nodded, then pulled the plug from the board. “It’s rather late, but he says he’ll see

you." He smoothed the hair over his ears with the flat of his hand. "It's the penthouse."

Liddell nodded, headed for a bank of elevators in the rear of the lobby. He jabbed the button marked *Penthouse*, chafed at the slow progress the cage made upward. The elevator glided to a smooth stop; the doors slid noiselessly open. Liddell crossed the small hall, pushed the buzzer set at the side of the door three times. There was the stuttering of a latch and the door swung open.

Mike Murphy stood in the middle of the room, a glass in his hand. He was tall, his broad tapering shoulders seeming to balance precariously on the slimness of his waist and hips. He wore his thick, black hair long on the sides, plastered back against his head. On top it was a mass of curls. His mouth was smeared with lipstick; his eyes were slightly off focus. He waved Liddell in.

"Come in, come in." He called over his shoulder. "You can come on out, honey. It's a friend."

The door to an inner room opened and a long-legged redhead walked out. Her hair had been loosened and fell over her shoulders in a molten cascade. She had on a blue gown that gave ample evidence she wore nothing under it. As she walked, her breasts traced wavering patterns on the shiny silk of the gown. Her eyes were slanted, green. She looked Liddell over, seemed to like what she saw.

"This is Claire Readon, Liddell.

Meet a real live private eye, baby."

"You should have come earlier. The party was fun." Her voice was sultry, disturbing.

Murphy waved toward a small portable bar that showed signs of having had a busy evening. "You'll have to make your own, Liddell. I don't think I could make it across the room."

Liddell walked over to the bar, found some ice cubes in a scotch cooler, dumped them into a glass. He spilled two fingers of bourbon over them, swirled it around the glass. "When's the last time you saw Lane?"

Murphy's features were marred with an annoyed frown. "Tonight, when I took the stuff out to her." He took a deep swallow from his glass. "How's that kid of yours getting along? That blondie can be fun when she —"

"Tate's dead. So's Lane." Liddell smelled his glass, took a swallow. It tasted as good as it smelled.

The other man did a slow double take. He blinked his eyes, shook his head. "Dead? How?"

Liddell shrugged. "Murder. The stones are missing. Looks like it was a heist."

"Wait a minute." Murphy put down the glass, walked across the room and disappeared into what was apparently a bathroom. There was a sound of water running. When he walked out, some of the vagueness in his eyes was gone. "When'd it happen?"

"Near as I can judge, around one. She called me, and I heard the shot. By the time I got out there, the cops were all over the place." He drained his glass, set it down. "They figure it for an inside job." He looked over at the redhead. "How many people were in on the deal, Mike?"

Murphy shrugged. "Just me and Laury on our end." He bit at the cuticle on his nail. "Arms, of course. He was buying the stuff."

"You didn't leak?"

"Me?" Murphy shook his head emphatically. "Hell, I never even mentioned it to Claire. Did I, kid?"

The redhead squirmed into a more comfortable position on the couch that caused the gown to dip breath-takingly at the neckline. "I still don't know what you're talking about." Her words were softly slurred. "What's more, I don't care. I came to this party for fun, not to talk business."

Murphy ignored her, smoothed some of the wrinkles out of his brow with the tips of his fingers. "This is a hell of a mess. You knew the stuff wasn't insured?" Liddell nodded.

"The police know about the stones?" Murphy asked.

"Yeah."

The big man groaned. "Now it comes. The Feds are going to want to know where the dough came from and why it wasn't declared. What a mess. If she'd only listened to me —"

"I listened to you, Mike. It didn't do me any good — so far," the

redhead said. "I guess I'm not smart like Laury."

"You're something better. You're alive," Murphy said. He turned back to Liddell. "It looks like Arms."

Liddell freshened his drink, took a sip. "Looks like." He looked from Murphy to the girl and back. "What time did you get the stuff out to her, Mike?"

"Ten-thirty. Eleven, maybe. I got back here in time to pick Red up at the stage door after the show. She's in the *1954 Revue*." He frowned as the redhead held her glass out to Liddell for a refill. "Maybe you better take it easy, baby. The cops may be around asking questions."

The redhead grinned saucily. "Don't give it another thought, Mike. I'm over eighteen." She accepted the refill and started to work on it, her eyes giving Liddell the full treatment over the rim.

"You got back here, then, maybe at twelve?" Liddell asked.

Murphy considered, nodded. "Just about."

"Didn't leave after that?"

Murphy's eyes narrowed. "Say what you mean. Are you asking me if I was anywhere near Lane's place when it happened? You think I was in on it?"

Liddell shook his head. "Look. There were only four or five people who knew Lane had the diamonds tonight. I'm trying to eliminate as I go along. Got any objections?"

Murphy stared at him sullenly. "I don't like it."

"Maybe Tate Morrow don't like being dead. But he is. How about it?"

"I didn't go out all night."

"Can you prove it?"

"If I have to."

"You have to."

The big man glared at him for a moment, dropped his eyes, shrugged. "There were eight or ten others here with us. Three or four of the other babes in the line at the *Revue* brought their dates up here. The party just broke about a half an hour ago." He looked over at the redhead. "That right, Claire?"

The redhead nodded solemnly. "We've been here ever since show break. Nobody left the place, not even for a paper."

Liddell drained his glass, set it down. "Okay, that's all I wanted to know." The phone started to ring. Murphy lumbered across the room to answer it.

The big man talked for a moment, then held his hand over the mouthpiece. "The cops. They want me to go out to identify Laury." He took his hand from the mouthpiece, talked for a moment and hung up. He wiped the thin film of perspiration off his upper lip, with the side of his hand. "I'm glad you broke the news to me first." He glanced at his watch. "Anything else you want from me, Liddell? I've got to get out there."

Liddell said, "Just one thing. These stones — any way of identifying them?"

The big man shook his head. "They were all loose. She wanted it that way. Some half-smart chiseler told her they were easier to sell and the Government couldn't trace them." He picked a cigarette from a container on the coffee table, fitted it to his lips with shaking hands. "That's why Arms was so interested. He was getting a buy at the price he was set to pay and the stuff wasn't even hot."

"Did Arms know that you hired the agency to watch over Lane?"

The pinched look was back in Murphy's eyes. "No. I was afraid to tell him, because I was afraid he'd kick over the deal. He didn't want anybody to know about it. Just Laury and me. And him."

"Mighty convenient."

"What do you mean?"

Liddell grinned humorlessly. "Suppose something happened to Laury and you? Then there'd be nobody to say that Laury ever had \$150,000 in unset diamonds, and they wouldn't have cost Arms anything."

Murphy started, the cigarette fell from his slack lips. "You don't think he meant to have us both killed?"

"Why not?" Liddell walked over to where the cigarette lay smouldering on the rug, picked it up and crushed it out. "Maybe the killer thought Tate was you and knocked him off without knowing. Maybe right now Arms thinks he's safe, that the only two people who knew

about the deal aren't in any condition to do any talking."

"But when he finds out?"
Murphy ran his finger around the inside of his collar as though it had suddenly become tight. He dropped into a chair. "What then?"

"He'll probably try to correct his mistake," Liddell said. "But, by then, maybe we'll have him in a spot where he won't be able to."

"What are you going to do?"

Liddell picked up his hat, set it on the back of his head. "I'm going out to Arms' place and have a little talk with him. If I get to him before he finds out you're still alive, I may be able to surprise him into giving himself away."

"You're going out there alone?"

Liddell grinned. "Like to come along?"

The big man shook his head emphatically. "No, thank you."

From the couch came the sound of a soft snore. Liddell walked over, took the empty glass from between the redhead's fingers, threw a knitted cover over her. The girl stirred slightly, purred softly and curled up into a ball on the couch.

4.

Louis Arms operated the *Casa Demain*, a plush booby trap on the south shore of Long Island. From the outside, it gave no indication of its character, but looked like any large country estate that had been kept up. Shrubs, lawn, trees were

all in good condition, only a small brass nameplate affixed to one of the pillars at the gate identifying it as a roadhouse.

Tonight it looked different than it had on the other occasions he had visited it. Without the flattery of a hidden battery of floodlights, it was just a tired old grey-white frame building, sprawling in the darkness. Tonight there were no cars in the parking lot, there was no high-pitched conversation from tuxedoed marks and their evening-dressed companions. Just a tired old grey white building relaxing with its makeup off.

Johnny Liddell left his car under a big tree a hundred yards off the entrance to the Casa. He cut across the shrubbery and headed for the rear of the building where Arms had his private office. He rapped at the door, waited. After a moment, the door opened a crack. "Yeah?" a voice asked.

"I want to see Arms. Tell him it's Johnny Liddell."

The door opened wider; the man stepped aside. "He's expecting you."

Liddell walked in, froze as the snout of a gun jabbed into his ribs. He made no attempt to resist as the man at the door relieved him of his .45, expertly fanned him.

"You know your way to the office," the man told him.

Liddell walked to the door at the end of the corridor marked *Private*, waited while the man with him knocked, then pushed the door open.

Louis Arms sprawled comfortably in an armchair. He waved to Liddell as he came into the room. The man with Liddell pushed him into the room, closed the door behind him.

"Hello, Liddell. You made good time." Louis Arms' voice was soft, silky with an elusive trace of the Boston Back Bay where he'd gotten his start. He was long and loose-jointed. His sandy hair had receded from his brow to the crown of his head, exposing a freckled pate. He had a ready smile that plowed white furrows in the mahogany of his face. It transformed everything about his expression except his eyes. They were cold, wary.

"Murphy?" Liddell wanted to know.

The man in the chair shrugged. "He's really got the wind up. That ice the broad was selling came from under the carpet. He can't account for it."

"That's his headache," Liddell growled.

The ready smile was back on Arms' lips. He shook his head. "It's yours. He's going to tell the cops it was all a pipe dream of yours, this story about me buying a lot of undercover ice."

Liddell's eyes went bleak. "And you?"

Arms reached out, snagged a cigarette from a table at his elbow. "I didn't ask you to drag me into it. It's an out and I'm taking it." He hung the cigarette in the corner of

his mouth, touched a match to it. "A cop named Murray called me about an hour ago. I told him the same thing."

"Thanks, pal."

"Look at it my way. I got enough grief without shopping for any. This broad makes me an offer, I take it. I wasn't in the market to get mixed up in any murder rap." He took the cigarette from between his lips, rolled it between his fingers. "Get it, Liddell? I don't want any part of it."

"What am I supposed to do? Hold the bag? You got the wrong boy, Arms. I lost one of my men in this deal. I don't stand still for that."

The cold smile was still pasted on the lean man's face. "I heard all about how tough you are, Liddell." The pat smile faded. "Maybe you haven't heard about me. I'm a guy don't like to be played for a patsy. By you or anybody else."

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning that if there were any diamonds in that place tonight, you got them," Arms told him bluntly. "Only three people knew about that deal outside of you and your stooge. One of them's dead, the other was with a mob all night and never went near the place — and me," he hit his chest with the side of his hand, "I know about me. That leaves you, shamus."

"That's what you think, Arms. I told you I wasn't taking this mess lying down. You're right about who knew about it, but you forgot one

thing. There's three people I'm sure of — and you're not one of them. The blonde is dead, Murphy's got an iron-clad alibi, and I'm sure about me. In my book, that leaves you." He jabbed his finger at the man in the chair. "And that's where I'm going to pin it."

The man who had let him into the room caught Liddell by the arm, swung him around. He was an inch or two shorter than Liddell, but what he lacked in height, he more than made up in breadth. His face was expressionless, dead-pan. "The boss don't like guys to raise their voices at him, Liddell." His voice was flat. "Don't do it again."

Liddell looked from the dead-pan face to the gun in the man's fist. "Don't count on the gun too much, Junior. I've seen guys take things like that away from guys and feed it to them."

The dead-pan was disturbed by an upward twist at the corners of the mouth. "You sure talk a rough evening." He tossed the gun over to where Arms sat. "Maybe you'd like to live it up?"

He gave Liddell no chance to sidestep his lunge. Automatically, the private detective fell away from it, saved himself the full force of the assault. The guard's shoulder caught him in the side, slammed him back against the door. He stumbled to his feet, found his arm in a lock. He struggled to free it, had the sensation of flying through the air. He slammed against the wall and

slid to a sitting position. He stayed there for a moment, shook his head to clear away the cobwebs. The chunky guard stood over him, feet braced.

"How do you like the kid's style, shamus?" Arms' silky voice insinuated itself, seeming far away. "That's judo. Learned it in the Marines."

Liddell braced his feet, slid upright against the wall.

The guard licked at his lips, lunged again. This time, Liddell was waiting. He chopped viciously at the side of the man's neck, heard him gasp. As the guard started to sink, Liddell brought his knee up, caught him in the face, straightened him up. Then he put every ounce of strength behind a right overhand.

The guard's head went back as though it were hinged. Liddell sank his left into his midsection to the cuff, stepped back and let the guard fall face forward. He hit the floor with a thud and didn't move.

"That's barroom brawling." Liddell wiped his mouth with his sleeve. "I learned it in McGowan's Saloon on Third Avenue."

Arms sat in the chair, the snout of the gun pointed at Liddell's midsection. The private detective ignored the gun, pulled a pack of cigarettes from his jacket pocket, lit one. He took a deep breath, exhaled through his nostrils.

"Louis isn't going to like you," the man in the chair grunted. "He learned other things in the Marines. They're much more permanent."

"You're scaring me to death, Arms." Liddell stepped across the guard's body and walked over to where the night club operator sat. "If you're going to pull that trigger, pull it now. Because I'm walking out of here. And from the minute I do, I'm going to spend every second proving that you killed the Lane broad."

Arms' face went white under its tan. The finger on the trigger tightened for a moment, then relaxed. He forced the smile back into place. "Don't worry, Liddell. I'm not messing up my rug." He dropped the gun into his lap. "There are other days and other places. Be smart and don't get under my feet. Or I might have to stamp you flat."

Liddell turned his back on him, walked over to where the guard still lay, breathing noisily. He turned him over, pulled his .45 from the man's jacket pocket and hooked it into his holster. He turned, stared at the man in the chair for a moment. "Okay, Arms. It looks like your pot. Murphy will go along because he don't want the Feds snooping. So you've got aces back to back. But take the advice of an old timer. Don't push your luck too hard on just one pair."

"I've done a little gambling in my time, too, Liddell," Arms drawled. "I've got a few pet rules of my own. Such as, don't bluff when there's no limit on table stakes."

It was almost light when Johnny Liddell got back to the Livermore Arms. He parked his car around the corner and walked to where he could keep an eye on the entrance.

He was on his third cigarette when a cab skidded to a stop at the curb, and the familiar broad-shouldered bulk of Mike Murphy stepped out onto the sidewalk. While the big man was paying the cabby, Liddell walked over to where he stood.

"It took you a long time, Mike," Liddell told him softly.

The big man started, turned. "You shouldn't sneak up on people like that, Liddell." His face was a damp grey in the early morning light. "I've had a bad night."

"Sometimes it gets worse before it gets better."

"Look," a hard note crept into the big man's voice. "Don't go giving me a hard time. Drop around in the morning, and —"

Liddell pulled his right hand out of his jacket pocket far enough for Murphy to see that it held a gun. "Why put off until tomorrow what can be knocked off tonight?" He flipped his butt at the gutter. "I don't like people walking out and leaving me in the middle, Mike. You and I have some talking to do."

Murphy shrugged resignedly. "Okay, come on up." He turned his back on the gun, led the way through the lobby toward the penthouse elevator. When the car had

started upward, he said, "I guess you've got a right to be sore, but there was nothing else I could do, Liddell."

"What am I supposed to do? Laugh it off like the little good sport I am and stand still for the rap?"

"They can't prove you had any thing to do with it. They think it was the kid. This Tate Morrow guy." Murphy shrugged. "He's dead. It can't hurt him. You start a stink and a lot of people get hurt. Me, Arms, you, all of us." The car slid to a stop. Murphy led the way to his apartment and opened the door with a key. "Why not let well enough alone?"

Liddell's smile showed no sign of amusement. "There's a little thing like a reputation to uphold, pal. And another little thing like paying off for your boys. Or wouldn't you understand that?"

"Cut it out. Do you think it feels good for me to have to go see Laury stretched out on a slab in a morgue?" Murphy scaled his hat at a chair, walked over to the bar, poured himself a stiff drink and tossed it off. "But that's no reason why we should foul everybody else up."

"What'd you tell the cops out there?"

Murphy poured some more liquor into his glass. "I denied that I knew anything about any diamonds. I told them that as far as I knew Laury never even heard of Arms."

He drained the glass, set it down. "I told them I didn't know of any connection you had with her."

Liddell showed his teeth in a grim grin. "But when I show them your retainer —"

"It was in cash. One guy's C-notes look pretty much like another's." Murphy dropped into a chair, raked his fingers through his hair. "I know I'm acting like a heel, Liddell, but that's it."

"Whose idea was this whole thing?"

The man in the chair looked up, chewed on his lower lips. "Arms. It wasn't the police that called when you were here. It was Arms. I had to call him back." He fumbled through his pockets, came up with a cigarette. "The cops had gotten to him and he denied the whole thing. He told me what would happen to me if I didn't back him up." His hand shook as he lit the cigarette.

"That's how he knew I was on my way out, eh?"

Murphy nodded. "After you left, I sent Red home in a cab. I got a call from some hick cop named Murray about a half hour after that. I went right out." He cupped his cigarette in his hand, took a deep drag. "They had her out at the county morgue. I had to identify her."

Liddell scowled down at him. "You're sure nobody but you and Arms was in on this diamond sale? Nobody else? Servants or anybody?"

"Nobody. Arms didn't want a leak. He wouldn't even have let me

hire you if he'd known." He got up, paced the room. "Even if he did do it, I can't spill. They'd have me as an accessory to Lane's tax evasion for one thing. I was her manager and made out all her returns. And besides, Arms probably has an iron-clad alibi and he'd wait it out until the heat was off and get me for it." He stopped pacing, took a last drag on the cigarette, stubbed it out. "I can't spill."

"Okay," Liddell growled. "Now at least I know where I stand. But I'm telling you just what I told Arms. I'm going to bust this wide open and I don't care who gets hurt. Someplace along the line, the killer must have made at least one mistake. That's all it takes. Just one."

6.

The morgue was in the basement of the new four-story stone courthouse in Carport. Johnny Liddell wheeled his car into the courthouse parking lot, squeezed it between two whitewashed lines that specified, "For Official Use Only." He crossed the courtyard, pushed through a revolving door, followed a stencilled arrow that pointed *To the Medical Examiner's Office*.

The door itself was of frosted glass, bore the legend *Medical Examiner's Office* with *Dr. Harry Mizner* in smaller letters under it. Next to it were two huge metal doors on which were lettered simply *Morgue*.

Johnny Liddell pushed open the

frosted glass door and walked into the medical examiner's office. The dank, damp air of the morgue beyond seemed to permeate the room. A painfully thin middle-aged man with a prominent adam's apple looked up from a pile of forms he was filling out. His hair was rumpled; the stub of a cigarette was clenched between his front teeth.

"Dr. Mizner?" Liddell asked.

The thin man shook his head. "I'm his assistant. Can I help you?"

"My name's Liddell. One of my boys was brought in tonight. His name is Tate Morrow. Gunshot."

The thin man scowled, nodded. "Just finished working him up. The doc's in talking with the lieutenant now." He nodded his head toward the morgue. "You can go in if you like."

Liddell nodded his thanks, headed for the white enamelled door set in the back of the office. As he pushed the door open, a blast of hot, carbolic-laden air enveloped him. At the far end of the room, a small group of men were huddled around one of several white examining tables. Liddell recognized the homicide lieutenant he had encountered in Laury Lane's house earlier in the evening.

Lieutenant Murray showed no signs of enthusiasm as the private detective walked up. He muttered something in a low voice that caused his companion, a short rotund man with a thatch of untidy white hair, to look up.

"You Dr. Mizner?" Liddell addressed the short man.

The medical examiner nodded, studied Liddell curiously. "You were the employer of the dead man?"

Liddell nodded, looked from the M.E. to the homicide man and back. "I thought maybe you might have something to clear the kid. Some evidence that he died before she did or that he didn't fire the gun? Anything that I can hang my hat on."

Dr. Mizner nodded. "We've got plenty for you, my boy. He was dead before that bullet ever hit him." He nodded to the canvas covered bulge on the table. "Death was caused by a depressed fracture at the base of the skull." He picked up a sheaf of papers, riffled through it. "The woman didn't kill him, either, from the looks of it. We did a dermal nitrate test soon's we brought her in. Negative."

"Doesn't mean a thing," Murray growled. "Lots of negative reactions show up even after you do fire a gun."

The M.E. shook his head. "Not in this case. Some guns with a tight breech don't kick back nitrates, but we did a test on this gun. The test showed positive." He looked over at Liddell. "I've just finished telling the lieutenant that I won't go along with his theory of the killing."

Murray growled deep in his chest, glared at Liddell. "Okay, so you prove to me you're right and I'll admit I was wrong. I've checked both Arms and the girl's manager,

Murphy. They both claim your story about a big diamond deal is for the birds. Got a better story that'll stand up?"

Liddell shook his head. "Arms threw the fear of God into Murphy. He got him on the phone right after you checked him. They got together on a story."

"It's your word against theirs. Can you make it stick?"

Liddell tugged at his lower lip with thumb and forefinger. "I don't know. The retainer was paid in cash, and Murphy insisted that it be kept just between Tate himself and me. But he did admit the story in front of a witness."

"Good. Who?"

"His girl. She was at his place when I got there. She's a redhead from the 1954 *Revue*. Her name's Claire Readon."

Murray tugged his notebook from his pocket, copied the name into it. "Know where she lives?"

Liddell shook his head. "No, but it shouldn't be hard to find out. Joe Gates is the press agent for the show. He knows where all the girls live. Sometimes he has to work up a party at a moment's notice." Liddell pulled out his wallet, fingered through the cards. "He's at the Edison Hotel. Has a combination office and apartment there." He consulted his watch "It's about 5:10 now. We should be able to get him."

"Not we. I'll get him," Murray growled. He stamped out of the

morgue into the M.E.'s office. After a few minutes he was back, his face long.

"Get him?" Liddell wanted to know.

The homicide man nodded. "I got him."

"He tell you where to reach her?"

Murray nodded. "Bellevue morgue. She was killed by a hit-and-run driver about three o'clock this morning."

7.

The Hotel Lowell was on an old stone building on a side street off Seventh Avenue on 47th Street. Its facade was dirty and neglected-looking. Inside, the lobby was dingy, lightless and dusty. A couple of discouraged-looking rubber plants were placed around it in an attempt at decoration, and half a dozen chairs were scattered in strategic places in a futile attempt to make it look cozy.

A gaunt, grey-haired old man with a pince-nez on a sleazy black ribbon stood behind the registration desk, looked askance at Johnny Liddell's unshaven chin, deep lines of fatigue.

"Miss Readon has had an accident. She's not here." He stopped picking his teeth, sucked at them noisily. "Matter of fact, I hear she's dead."

"How about a room-mate? Understood she shared a room with another girl in the show." Liddell

consulted a pencilled note on the back of an envelope. "Leona Sablell." He looked up. "She in?"

"Who'd you say you were?" the old man demanded.

"Tell her I'm a detective working on her room-mate's accident." He interpreted the look of disbelief in the room clerk's eyes. "A private detective. Insurance."

His disbelief washed out, the old man sat down at a neglected looking keyboard, jabbed in a key, talked into the mouthpiece. He tugged out the key and nodded. "She's in 312." He lost interest in Liddell, went back to an open copy of the *Mirror*.

A blonde opened the door to 312 in response to his knock. She was wearing a hostess gown that clung closely to a figure he considered worth clinging to. Her thick, glossy blonde hair was caught just above the ears with a bright blue ribbon, then allowed to cascade down over her shoulders.

"You the insurance dick?" She looked him over, stood aside and followed him into the small living room.

"Cozy place you've got here." Liddell tossed his hat on an end table.

"It's a dump and you know it," the blonde contradicted him. From close up she looked older than she had in the dim light of the hall. The bright table light mercilessly exposed the fine network of lines under her eyes and the losing fight

her makeup was waging with the lines at the sides of her mouth. She looked tired. "You didn't come up here to write the place up for House Beautiful. What's on your mind?"

"Claire."

The blonde's lower lip trembled slightly. "The poor kid. Did they get the one that did it?"

Liddell shook his head.

"What kind of a rat can he be? To hit a kid and let her lay there in the gutter to die like a dog?" she said bitterly.

"I don't think she was hit there."

Liddell picked up two cigarettes from a cup on the coffee table, lit them, and passed one to the girl. "I've had a good look at the place. My guess is she was driven there and dumped."

"Why do you say that?"

Liddell shrugged. "No sign of skid marks, for one thing. For another, when a car plows into somebody, a lot of dirt is dislodged from under the fender. No dirt. In fact, no signs of a hit-and-run."

The blonde stood with the cigarette halfway to her lips. "What are you trying to tell me?"

"I think the kid was murdered. Her body was dumped there in an attempt to make it look like a hit-and-run." He took a deep drag on the cigarette, let the smoke dribble from his nostrils. "She was crossing from north to south on a one way street, yet the fracture is on the left side of her skull."

"So?"

"The street runs east. If a car tagged her, it would have thrown the right side of her head against the curb."

"Unless it was going the wrong way on the one-way street."

"Unless it was going the wrong way on the one-way street," he conceded. "But my guess is that there was no car."

"But why should anyone go to all that trouble to kill a kid like Claire? She didn't have an enemy in the world. Everybody was crazy about her."

Liddell watched while the girl crossed the room. The tired lines in her face weren't duplicated in her figure. "You were with her last night. Up at Murph's place?"

The blonde nodded. "Four of the other girls and I."

"What happened?"

"Nothing. Murph picked us up at the stage door after the show. We went up to his place. I left the party about two with the rest of the girls. Claire stayed on."

"She didn't leave the party at all?"

The blonde shook her head. "Nobody did."

"You're sure of that?"

"Positive. It was a pretty good party, but nobody left until it broke." She took the cigarette from between her lips, studied the carmined end. "Of course, some of the girls and their dates wandered off into other rooms for awhile, but nobody left."

"Claire wander off?"

The blonde caught her full lower lip. "No more than anybody else. They were in Murph's study for awhile."

"Where's that located in relation to the living room?"

"You're blowing up a dry well, mister." The blonde shook her head. "The study's at the back of the apartment and they would have had to cross the whole living room to get out. I'll swear on anything you want that neither Claire nor Murph left that apartment for even ten minutes."

"How long did Claire know Murph?"

The blonde shrugged. "Six' or seven months. She met him at a party over at Lee Stevens' place. There were a lot of radio people there. Claire thought Murph could help her break into radio."

"Why?"

"He was a big wheel in radio until he took over the Lane dame. I guess he'll go back into it. He has a lot of connections. Claire thought he could help her." She took a last nervous drag at her cigarette, then crushed it out. "The poor kid. She wanted so much—and the way she had to end up." She shook her head. "I think you're wrong. There's nobody had any reason to hurt that kid. She never did a thing to a soul."

"Did she ever mention Louis Arms?"

"The hood that runs that joint out on the south shore?"

Liddell nodded.

"Never. I'm sure she didn't know the guy. Why?"

"I don't know. I have a hunch Arms could be the guy who had her killed."

The blonde's jaw dropped. "You're crazy. Why would a big shot like Arms knock off a kid that's hardly got the hayseed out of her ears? This was her first year in town."

"I don't know. Arms doesn't like to leave loose threads hanging around. Maybe Claire was a loose thread." He reached over, took another cigarette, chain-lit it from the one he held. "She ever mention Laury Lane?"

"Just that Murph was her manager. I don't think she ever met her. Lane was pretty snooty, you know. Didn't mix with chorus girls." She ridged her forehead, regarded him through narrowed eyes. "How would she be a loose end?"

"I don't know. All I know is that Arms is pretty anxious to keep something pretty quiet. One by one the people who knew about it are waking up dead. Maybe he thought Claire knew about it."

The blonde shook her head. "I never heard her mention the guy's name, and she used to spill the works to me. Like I was her old lady or something." She continued to shake her head. "I never heard her mention his name."

Liddell got up, walked over, recovered his hat. "Okay, Lee. That's

what I wanted to know. Maybe I'll be seeing you around."

The blonde split her soft lips in a grin. "If you don't, it's your fault." She pulled herself up from the couch, paid no attention to the expanse of thigh the open gown revealed. "Do you have to go?"

Liddell nodded. "Yeah. You see, there are only two people left who know what Arms is so anxious to conceal. I'm going to pay a visit to the other one."

8.

Mike Murphy had aged ten years in ten hours. His hair was ruffled, there were discolored sacs under his eyes and the dark shadow of a beard glinted on his chin as he opened the door to Liddell.

"Liddell! I've been trying to reach you. Did you hear about the redhead?"

Liddell nodded, walked into the apartment, closed the door behind him. "I heard. I'm also convinced it was no hit-and-run."

The big man headed for the bar, found the bourbon bottle empty, settled for some scotch. He tossed it off. "You think it was murder?"

Liddell nodded. "A pretty sloppy murder, at that."

Murphy nodded, paced the room. "Sloppy or neat, the result's the same. The kid's dead." He stopped, stared at Liddell. "But why? She didn't know a thing. I told you I didn't tell her anything."

"Maybe she overheard or took part in a telephone conversation that made her dangerous."

Murphy licked at his lips. "You — you think when Arms called here? How could he know she was here?"

Liddell walked over to the bar, helped himself to a drink. "I don't mean that call." He drained his glass, set it down. "The earlier call."

"I don't follow you, Liddell."

"I got a call around one or one-thirty. It was a girl. She said she was Lane. Asked me to get out there right away."

"So?"

Liddell shrugged. "Lieutenant Murray checked the local operator. Lane never made a call to New York that night." He poured some more liquor into the glass, swirled it around. "Funny, huh?"

"A scream. Sounds like you're making out a case against yourself. Then you didn't get a call?"

"I got the call all right. And it's not me I'm making the case out against."

"Who then?"

"You. That call was made from right here."

The big man's jaw dropped. "You crazy? You said yourself you heard the shot. What are you trying to pull, Liddell?"

Liddell grinned humorlessly. "Shows how dumb I really am. I thought it was a shot." He looked at Murphy. "That's what I was sup-

posed to think. That way it set the time of the kill and gave some people an alibi."

"Look, Liddell," Murphy growled. "I can account for every minute of my time. From show break at eleven right through to —"

"Nice big place you've got here," Liddell cut him off. "Living room, couple of bedrooms. A study, too?"

The big man's eyes narrowed. "Get to the point."

"I'll bet the study's pretty well set up. Ping pong, maybe. Big leather chairs. The works, eh?"

"There a law against being comfortable? What's the furnishing of my study got to do with it?"

"Everything. Once I learned you'd spent years in radio." Liddell took a swallow from his glass, watched the other man over the rim. "You know how some sound effects men fake the sound of a shot on a live mike, Murph? They smack leather with a ping pong paddle. It makes a better shot than live ammo."

The good looks of the big man had disappeared. His lips straightened out into thin, bloodless lines; hard lumps formed at the sides of his mouth. "Go on."

"You and Claire disappeared into the study for awhile. Some way you got her to make that call, probably told her it was a practical joke. Then you set out to get her drunk. But not drunk enough, because she tumbled to the connection when I popped in here to break the news."

Murphy's hand dipped into his jacket pocket. When it re-appeared, he had a snubnosed .38 in his fist. "But why should I kill Lane? She was my meal ticket. Besides, I was forty minutes away. Forty minutes, Liddell."

"She was already dead when you picked the girls up at the stage door. You didn't have to go out there. All you had to do was try to establish the time it happened. And you almost got away with it."

"That's not what the police think. They've got your boy Tate measured for it, and —"

"No more. They know he was sapped before he was shot in the back. You want to know something else? That gun of Lane's had a faulty breech. It spit back nitrates when it was fired. Lane's hand gave a negative reaction to the paraffin test. Yours won't."

"You haven't given me a reason why I should kill her," Murphy grated through clenched teeth. "Go on, show me how smart you are."

"If I were smart, I would have tumbled long ago. Those diamonds you were supposed to be buying up for her. They were phonies, weren't they? You knew you had to put up, but it was a cinch either Lane or Arms would spot them. Either way it was curtains. You had to see to it that the diamonds disappeared before the deal went through." He scowled at the gun in the big man's hand. "I should have known there was something fishy about the deal

when you paid the retainer in cash and made such a big deal about nobody knowing Tate was body-guarding your client."

Murphy nodded. "You're as smart as I thought I was."

"Why'd you kill the redhead, Murph?"

The big man shrugged. "I had to. Anyway, what's the difference after you've killed once?" He wiped his upper lip with the side of his left hand. "She guessed the phone call was intended to set up a phony alibi. She tried to put the shake on me deeper than I was willing to go. I lost my temper and hit her with a bottle." He licked at his lips with the tip of his tongue. "All I had to do was get her down to my car and dump her some place where it'd look like a hit-and-run. I've carted dames out of here in worse condition. No one paid any attention."

"And now?"

"The last act. You."

Liddell watched the finger whiten on the trigger. "A sucker play. You can't get away with knocking me off. You'll tip the whole story."

The big man shook his head, twisted the bloodless lips into a caricature of a grin. "You wouldn't, I suppose? I'll get away with it. Too bad you won't be here to see it."

"They'll never buy it."

"Why not? You came up here, admitted you followed the redhead home and killed her because she heard you admit to me that you killed Lane. It might sound thin,

but you won't be in any condition to contradict it, and —"

The glass filled with liquor left Liddell's hand, streaked for the big man's face. Murphy tried to duck away, started squeezing the trigger. Slugs bit chunks of plaster out of the wall near Liddell's head. Murphy screamed and pawed at his eyes as the raw liquor burned into them. He tried to raise the gun again, but he didn't get it to firing level.

Liddell moved in relentlessly. He hit the big man's wrist with the side of his hand. The gun clattered to the floor from nerveless fingers. Liddell slammed his fist against the side of the man's jaw, sent him reeling backwards. He followed up, back-handed Murphy's head into position, then took the fight out of him with an uppercut to the midsection.

Murphy went down, trying to catch Liddell around the knees. The private detective sidestepped, kicked him in the face, knocked him flat on his back. The big man lay there, moaning, pink-tinged bubbles forming between his lips.

Liddell walked to the big desk against the wall, dialled the number of the Carport Police Department. After a moment, he was connected with Lieutenant Murray in homicide. Briefly, he outlined the story as he knew it.

He could hear the sound of a sharp intake of breath from the other end. Then, after a moment, "Will he sign a statement?" Murray wanted to know.

"I haven't asked him yet," Liddell said. "I have an idea he will, though."

"Not if he's in his right mind," the homicide man told him. "It's a pretty flimsy story to juice up an electric chair with."

Liddell grinned. "I've got an extra generator up my sleeve. When I hang up, I'm calling Arms and I'm telling him how Murphy tried to frame him for the Lane kill. Arms is a little sensitive about things like that. I've got an idea Murphy would prefer the law to Arms and his boys."

Murray chuckled. "Maybe he would at that. I'll send a couple of my boys in to pick him up." There was a click as he broke the connection.

Murphy was moaning his way back to consciousness. Liddell walked over, caught him by the front of his shirt and dragged him to a chair. The agent was no longer dapper. His eyes were watery, the carefully combed hair hung lankly down over his face. He was sick, breathing noisily through a smashed nose.

Liddell buried his fingers in the man's hair, pulled his head back. "Listen carefully, you rat. I've notified both the cops and Arms. I told

them what I know — that you tried to frame Arms for this kill. They're both sending a couple of boys for you. You understand?"

Murphy's eyes stopped rolling. He made a visible effort to focus them on the private detective's face. "You — you told Arms?"

Liddell grinned grimly. "Yeah. Take your pick, pal. If you haven't written out a full statement by the time the homicide boys get here, I'll see to it that they go home without you. I'll bet Arms' torpedoes won't be discouraged that easily."

"Don't throw me to Arms, Liddell." The pink bubbles formed and burst between his lips. "Get me a pen. I'll make a statement. Get me a pen."

"You're damned right you'll make a statement," Liddell growled. "Get on your feet."

Murphy looked up at him, licked his lips, stumbled to his feet. He stood there swaying.

"This is for the kid, Murph." He slammed his fist against the big man's mouth. There was the sound of crunching teeth. The big man went staggering backward and fell across a table.

"You won't be needing teeth where you're going."



Portrait of a Killer

No. 12 — Jesse Walker

BY DAN SONTUP

WHEN you come right down to it, he was just another young punk, a little "tough guy" trying to act like a big-time crook. But he wasn't too good at it. Robbing a candy store for the few bucks in the till was about the limit of Jesse Walker's toughness. He advanced his rating just a bit by adding murder to his record, but where he differed from the rest of his breed was in the fact that he kept a diary — a record of all his petty crimes and the one big crime of homicide.

Jesse and his buddy, Guy Nichols, pulled the candy store job on a night in March in Brooklyn. They waited until the store was empty except for the owner and his wife, and then they pushed open the door and walked in. Guy stayed by the door as a lookout, and Jesse walked over to the counter.

Sam Wolchock, the owner, came over to Jesse and asked him what he wanted. For an answer, Jesse pulled out a .32 caliber gun and told Wolchock to open the cash drawer. Wolchock hesitated, and Jesse pushed him to one side and started for the cash drawer himself. That's when Sam Wolchock went

into action to defend his property.

He made a grab for Jesse, his hands reaching for the gunman's throat. They struggled for a moment, and then Jesse pushed the old man away from him, opened the drawer and scooped out the few bills and some change inside. But Wolchock wasn't giving up. He rushed at Jesse, and once again Jesse pushed him away. Then, while the man and his wife stared at him, Jesse raised the gun and started pulling the trigger. One .32 slug after another slammed into Sam Wolchock's body until he crumpled to the floor.

Jesse and Guy made good their escape. The total proceeds of their haul were four one-dollar bills, a few cents in change, one widow, and one dead man.

Jesse and Guy split up after this, but meanwhile, Jesse had made a brief entry in the small diary he carried with him. He wrote down the date, the place, and the fact that he had killed a man with his .32 gun.

Jesse's diary was soon pretty full. The dates and places were different, but the crimes were generally the same — petty thievery, armed rob-

bery, muggings, and so forth. His diary read like a cross-country tour of crime.

The job he pulled in Mattoon, Illinois, was about like the rest of them. With the power given to him by the gun in his fist, he pulled another holdup and this time made off with a mink coat. He was afraid to try and leave town immediately because he knew the police would be watching all exits out of town closely after the robbery. He figured on hanging around for a while and then clearing out when things cooled off a bit.

Deciding to act like an ordinary citizen — after hiding the mink coat — he took a stroll down the main street of the town. Nobody paid any attention to him, and he was enjoying his walk, when he suddenly saw two cops coming toward him with a pair of bloodhounds. The hounds were sniffing at the ground and tugging at their leashes.

Jesse was scared — good and scared — but he thought fast just the same. He knew if he made a break for it now, the police would spot him. Besides, he didn't even know if the bloodhounds were out after him or some other criminal. Then, from the crowd, Jesse heard someone talking about the robbery he had pulled. The hounds had been given the scent at the scene of the crime and were now following it. Jesse stood where he was. There was nothing else he could do.

The bloodhounds sniffed their

way along the sidewalk, came to Jesse — and then went right on by him.

Jesse smiled to himself. He was safe now. He waited until he thought the coast was clear, and then he picked up the mink coat and headed out of town for Chicago.

But Jesse hadn't reckoned with routine police procedure, the spreading of the news of a crime to nearby cities. When Jesse tried to pawn the mink coat in Chicago, he was immediately picked up by the police and brought back to Mattoon. The diary had been found on him, and once again routine police procedure went into operation. The New York police were notified that there was an entry in the diary about killing a man in Brooklyn during the month of March, and they went right to work on it.

It was just a matter of checking the records until the candy store robbery and murder was found — and the New York police also found that two other men were now being held in jail indicted for the robbery and the killing. A New York detective was sent to Mattoon, and when he saw Jesse he knew why the two men now being held for the crime had been identified by eye witnesses as the guilty ones. Jesse and one of the men in jail looked almost exactly alike. The detective set to work on Jesse, trying to get a confession out of him, trying to get him to admit to the murder in Brooklyn. Jesse held out, though. The penalty

for murder was the electric chair; the penalty for armed robbery was a few years in jail. Even if they convicted him for all the robberies in his diary and sent him up for life, he'd still be alive.

But the police were just as stubborn as Jesse. They stuck with it and were finally able to break Jesse down. He confessed to the crime, told them where Guy Nichols could be found, and was brought back to New York for trial.

The two innocent men were freed. Jesse and Guy were convicted and sentenced to die.

When he was asked why he kept the diary, Jesse explained that he did it in order to prove how tough he was to all the women he picked up on his travels around the country. He said it always impressed them a lot.

No one was the least bit impressed when Jesse died in the electric chair.



IT WAS a fourplex
out near the beach.
I stopped the car,
looked at the ad again,
and went up the walk.
Only two of the mail-
boxes had names on
them, and neither was the one I
wanted.

This was the right address, though,
so I picked one at random and

And Share Alike

pressed the buzzer. Nothing hap-
pened. I tried again, then waited a
minute or two and tried the other.
No one answered. It was very quiet

*I asked her if she wanted
me to steal the money.
"No," she said. "It's
already been stolen.
Twice."*

A Complete Novel

BY
CHARLES
WILLIAMS



in the hot afternoon sun. A few cars went past on the seawall, and far out in the Gulf a shrimp boat crawled like a fly across a mirror.

I swore under my breath. Maybe one of the other tenants would know where he was. I tried the buzzer marked *Sorenson* first, and when it came up nothing I leaned on the one which said *James*.

The whole place was as silent as the grave.

I shrugged, and went back down the walk. I was about to get in the car when I saw the patio wall in the rear of the place. A walk ran past the side of the building to a high wooden gate which was closed. I stepped across the front lawn and went back to the gate and opened it.

"Oh. Excuse me," I said.

The girl was a brunette and she was sunbathing in the bottom part of a two-fragment bathing suit. She was lying face down on a long beach towel. She turned her head casually and looked at me through dark glasses.

"Are you looking for someone?" she asked.

I told her I was looking for Mr. Winlock, who had advertised to buy a late-model car. She shrugged a satiny shoulder:

"They may have gone out on a boat. I think he fishes."

"Oh," I said. "Well. Thanks a lot."

The cigarette in my hand was burning short. I turned and tossed it through the gate onto the walk.

When I looked back she was working the strap of the halter gizmo up between her arm and side. She clamped it there and started to turn on her side, facing me, until it became obvious to both of us that the thing wasn't big enough to allow any leeway if she didn't have it straight. It was missing the mark. And there was quite a bit of it to miss.

"Would you mind?" she asked calmly. "Just for a moment —"

"Sure," I said. I turned and stared out the gate. In a moment she said, "All right," and I turned around. She was sitting up on the towel with the long legs doubled under her. The halter was tied.

I'd called her a girl, but she was probably near thirty.

"How much do you want for the car?" she asked. I told her. I wondered what was on her mind. "I've been thinking of buying a car," she told me. "Is it worth what you're asking?"

"Every nickel of it," I said, ready to go into a sales pitch. Then I got this impression she wasn't even listening to what I said.

She took off the glasses and stared thoughtfully at me. Her eyes were large and self-possessed, and jet-black like her hair. The hair was long, drawn into a roll on the back of her neck. She looked Spanish, except that her skin was very fair.

"There's something about your face," she said. "I keep thinking I should know who you are."

So that was it. "Not unless you've got a long memory," I said.

She smiled. "About six years? I was quite a football fan in those days. Scarborough, wasn't it? Lee Scarborough? All-Conference left half—"

I wished we could get back to the car trade. You can't eat six-year-old football scores.

She said, "Why didn't you join the pros?" She took a puff on the cigarette she was smoking and tossed it into a flower-bed without taking her eyes from my face.

"I did, but it didn't jell," I said. "Bum knee." I squatted on my heels. "How about the car? You really want to buy one?"

"I think so. But why do you want to sell it?"

"I need the money." I went on, "It's out front, if you want to drive it."

"All right," she said. "But I'd have to change. Would you mind waiting upstairs?"

"Not at all," I said. We stood up. She was tall, all right.

"I'm Diana James," she said. She saw me glance down at her left hand, and smiled. "You'll only have to make one sales talk. I'm not married."

"I'd have given you odds the other way."

"I was, once. But, as you say, it didn't jell."

We went up the outside stairs at the rear and in through the kitchen. She pulled a bottle of bourbon out

of a cupboard and set it on the drain.

"Mix yourself a drink, and go on into the living-room. Soda and ice-cubes in the refrigerator."

"I hate to drink alone this early in the day," I said.

She smiled. "All right. If you insist."

I mixed two and handed her one. We went on through to the living room looking out over the Gulf. She took a sip of her drink and put it on the coffee-table.

"Just make yourself at home," she said. "I won't be long."

I watched her walk back across the dining-room to the short hall which led to the bedroom and bath. It seemed to take her a long time.

The car, I thought. Remember? Don't louse it up.

I sat down and glanced about the room. Her purse was on the table at the end of the couch. I glanced at it, then shrugged and started to take another sip of my drink. I stopped, and my eyes jerked back to the table.

It wasn't the purse. It was the alligator key case lying beside it. The zipper was open and the keys dangled loose on the glass. And one of them was that square-shouldered shape you recognize anywhere: the ignition key to a General Motors car. Just who was kidding whom?

Well, I thought, maybe she wanted two, or she was selling the other one. It was her business.

When she came out she had on a short-sleeved white summer dress

'and gilt sandals without stockings. She was tall and cool and very easy on the eye. She smiled and asked, "What do you do, Mr. Scarborough?"

"This and that," I said, getting up. "I sell things. Or try to. Real estate was the last."

"I don't mean to pry," she said, "but I take it you're not doing anything at the moment?"

"That's right. I'm thinking of going to Arabia with a construction outfit. That's one reason I want to sell the car."

"Are you married?"

"No."

"Did you ever think of making a lot of money?"

"Sure. Some day I'm going to invent the incandescent lamp."

"A little soured, Mr. Scarborough? You surely haven't run out of dreams already? At — twenty-eight?"

"Twenty-nine. Look, with a dream and ten cents you can buy a cup of coffee. The only thing I was ever any good at was moving a football from one place to another place, and you need two knees for it."

"A little tough," she murmured.

"That's nice."

"Why?"

"I was just thinking again. We might make a deal."

I asked, "Why do you want two cars?"

"You notice things, don't you? Why are you suspicious?"

"Do you?"

She looked me right in the face. "No," she said.

I was burning. "What's the idea of wasting my time?"

"Maybe I wasn't. I said we might make a deal. Remember?"

She turned away to look through the long windows, and when she turned back I was standing in front of her. I pulled her to me and kissed her, hard, with my hands digging into the small of her back. But she wasn't wasting my time then. I was.

She rolled with it like a passed-out drunk, not even closing her eyes, and broke it up. "That wasn't quite the deal I had in mind," she said.

"What's wrong with it?"

"Nothing, I suppose, under the right circumstances. Why don't you sit down? You'd probably be more comfortable."

I was still angry, but there was no percentage in knocking myself out. I sat down. She went out into the kitchen and came back in a minute with two drinks. She set them down and stared thoughtfully at me. "I've been trying to size you up."

"Why?"

"I'm coming to that. I think I can see you now. A little tough — and what's more to the point, a little cynical, as anybody would be who was a hero at 18 and a has-been at 25. You sold things for a while, but you sold less and less as time went by and the customers had a little trouble remembering who Swede Scarborough was. Yes. I

want to make you a proposition."

"I hope you have better luck than I did."

"You take women pretty casually, don't you?" she said.

"There's another way?"

"Never mind. Do you want to hear what I asked you up here for?"

"Shoot."

"Remember, I asked you how you'd like to make a lot of money? Well, I think I know where there is a lot of it, for anybody with nerve enough to pick it up."

"Wait a minute. How do you mean, pick it up? Steal it?"

She shook her head. "No. It's already been stolen. Maybe twice."

I put down my cigarette. She was watching me closely.

"Just how much money?" I asked.

"A hundred and twenty thousand dollars," she said.

2.

It was very quiet in the room. She was still watching me. "Well? How does it sound?"

"I don't know," I said. "I haven't heard anything about it yet."

"All right," she said. "I have to take a chance on somebody if I'm ever going to do anything about it — and I think you're the one. It'll take nerve, and intelligence, and it has to be somebody without a criminal record, so the police wouldn't have their eyes on him afterward —"

"Okay," I said. I knew what she

meant. Somebody who wasn't a criminal, but who might let a little rub off on him if the price was right. I wanted to hear more first. "Whose money is it?" I asked. "And where is it?"

"It's just a long guess," she said. "I said I *think* I knew where it was. You add up a lot of things to get to it."

"Such as?"

"Just a minute." She got up and went into the bedroom. When she came back she handed me two newspaper clippings. I looked at the first one. It was datelined here in Sanport, June 8th — two months ago.

SEARCH WIDENS FOR MISSING BANK OFFICIAL

"J. N. Butler, vice-president of the First National Bank of Mount Temple, was the object of a rapidly expanding manhunt today as announcement was made of the discovery of a shortage in the bank's funds estimated at \$120,000 —"

I looked up at her. She smiled. I read on.

"Butler, prominent in social and civic activities of the town for over 20 years, has been missing since Saturday when, according to Mrs. Butler, he announced his intention of going to Louisiana for a week-end fishing trip. He did not return Sunday night as scheduled."

I read the second one. It was

dated three days later, and was a rehash of the previous story except that Butler's car had been found "abandoned in the 200 block of Duval Boulevard." I handed them back. Then it hit me. I dug out Winlock's ad, that had brought me down here in the first place. The address was 220 Duval Boulevard.

"That's right," she said. "That's one of the factors."

"I'll bet. What's the pitch? All this was two months ago. Have they found him, or what?"

"They haven't found him," she said. "And I don't think they will."

"Why?" I asked. I thought I knew.

She laughed, suddenly. "I didn't kill him." Then she sobered. "It was just like her, though. Just like her to leave the car here."

"Just like who?"

"Mrs. Butler, of course."

"Go on," I said.

"This is no child's game, you know," she said. "And it could be dangerous as hell."

"All right. Let me guess. If Mrs. Butler ditched the car, then she killed him. Only how would you know that? How well did you know him, anyway?"

"Well enough. That fishing trip was going to last a lot longer than a weekend."

Then I saw it, or most of it. She smiled at me with her eyes. I said, "There's one thing I'm still not sure of. That's why you're so certain *she's* the one who killed him and

left his car in front of your apartment. Wasn't there anyone else who could have known Butler was going to run off with you?"

"It's not likely. And nobody else but that vindictive bitch would have done just that. I mean, leaving the car right out front here. She would do that."

"How about telling me the whole thing?" I said.

"Suppose you tell me something first," she said coldly. "Do you want in, or don't you?"

"What do you think?"

"Not worried about breaking the law?"

"Let's put it this way. Whoever's got that money is outside the law himself, or herself. So he or she can't yell cop. What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to search the Butler house. Tear it apart, if necessary, until we find the money, or some evidence as to what became of Butler, or something."

"With her in the house? Think again."

"No," she said. "That's why it takes two of us. She's here in town now, attending a meeting of some Historical Society. I'll hunt her up, get her plastered, and keep her that way. She may be plastered anyhow. You'll have days, if necessary, to dismantle the house and put it back together before she sobers up enough to go home."

"You're looking for a patsy," I said. "If something goes wrong

you're okay but I'm a dead duck."

"Don't be silly. The house is in the middle of a park that'd cover a city block. There's one servant, who goes home as soon as Mrs. Butler leaves. You could take an orchestra with you, and nobody'd ever know you were in there. The police may check the place once a night when nobody's home, but you don't have to tear off a door and leave it lying on the lawn, just to get in. What do you think?"

"For sixty thousand, it might be worth the risk."

She raised her eyebrows. "Who said anything about sixty thousand? I'm offering you a third."

"And you know what you can do with it. It's half or nothing."

"You've got a nerve —"

"What do you mean, nerve? I'm the one who has to go up there and stick his head in the lion's mouth and search the place. You don't —"

"All right, relax," she said. "I just thought I'd try. Half it is."

"That's better," I said.

"There's another thing, too," she said suddenly. "She's not going to get away with it. The drunken bitch."

Well, I thought, I'll be a sad —

"Get this through your head," I said. "This is a business proposition, or I'm out, as of now. There'll be no wild-haired babes blowing their tops and killing each other in anything I'm mixed up in. I thought you were tough."

She glared at me. "I am," she

said. "What I mean is she's not going to get away with the money."

"That's better. Just keep it in mind."

"I can drive to Mount Temple in about four hours," I said.

She shook her head. "You'll have to go on the bus."

"What do you mean, the bus?"

"Look. Where are you going to leave your car, once you get there? You'll be there, maybe, two days. In the drive?"

"I'll park it somewhere else."

"Somebody might notice it. The police might impound it. A hundred things could happen."

She was right. A car with out-of-town tags sitting around that long was going to attract attention. But the bus idea —

"I'm supposed to get in there and out without being seen by anybody who could identify me later. The bus is no good."

She nodded. "That's right too. I think the best thing is for me to drive you up there —"

"Listen," I said. "Here's how we work it. You drive me up there, drop me off in back somewhere where there's no light, then come back and keep an eye on Mrs. Butler. This is Tuesday night. If the house is as big as you say, I'll want two full days. So at exactly two o'clock Friday morning you ease by in back of the place again and I'll be out there waiting for you."

We'll either have the money, or we'll know it's not there."

"Right." She leaned back and stared at me with her eyes a little cool and hard. "And just in case you haven't thought of it yet," she said, "don't get any brilliant ideas about running out with it if you find it, just because I'm not there. You know how far you'd get if the police received an anonymous phone call."

She had it figured from every angle. "Who'd run off from you?"

"For that much money, you would. But don't try it."

"And while we're on the subject," I said, "don't try to doublecross me either."

3.

We left Sanport at midnight, after I'd put my own car in a storage garage and bought a few things I'd need: flashlight with spare batteries, small screwdriver, scotch tape, half a dozen packs of cigarettes. I checked them off in my mind. They were all there.

She drove fast, around 60 most of the time. There was little traffic, and the towns along the highway were asleep. We came into one, and she slowed to 35 as we went through. "It's the next one," she said.

"You won't get back until after daylight."

"It doesn't matter. Nobody knows me there. And Mrs. Butler probably won't be up before noon."

"The police may tail her. Just on the chance she might be meeting Butler."

"I know." She punched the cigarette lighter, and said, "Hand me a cigarette, Lee. What if they are? They don't know anything."

When the lighter popped out, I lit the cigarette and handed it to her. We were running through a long river bottom now, with dark walls of trees on both sides. I looked at her. She had put on a long, pleated white skirt and maroon blouse. She was a smooth job, with the glow of the dash highlighting the rounded contours of her face and shining in the big, dark eyes.

I lit one for myself. "There's still one thing I don't like. A lot of that money may be in negotiable securities instead of cash. He'd know how to convert them, but —"

"No," she said. "He was going to get it all in cash."

"It would make a pretty good-sized briefcase full, figuring lots of it would be tens and twenties. Where would you have hidden it?"

"It's an old house," she said. "The only thing to do is start at the attic and work down, a room at a time. Look for places that seem to have been repapered recently or where there's been some repair work, like around window-sills and door-frames. Trapdoors above clothes closets, in the floors or walls. And remember, she's smart. She's just as likely to wrap it in old paper and throw it in a trunk or a barrel of

rubbish. Take your time; tear the place apart if you have to. She's in no position to call the police."

"We hope," I said.

"We know."

"All right," I said. "But I still don't want her to catch me there. So I've been figuring a way you can tip me off if she gets away from you and you think she's headed home. Call the house, Long Distance —"

"But, my God, you couldn't answer the phone. There's no way you could tell who it was."

"Wait till I finish. Here's what you do. Call right on the hour. I won't answer, so call again at a quarter past. Then try it again at half-past, as near as you can. Those three calls, spaced like that, will be the signal. When I hear the third one, scram."

"That's good," she said, nodding. "You know how to use your head. It's funny, but in a lot of ways you're just like Butler."

"Not too much, I hope."

"Why?" she asked.

"He's dead. Remember?"

In a few minutes she said, "We're almost there. It's on the left as you go into town."

I looked, but it was too dark to see much. All I got was the shadowy impression of a house set far back from the street among the darker gloom of big trees. We made a gentle turn to the right and then were on the street going into town, with houses and lawns on both sides.

She turned left before we got to it, went a block, and turned left again.

She slowed and the car came to a standstill for not more than two seconds. I slid out and eased the door shut. Her hand lifted in a gesture and the car slid away. I was on my own.

The red tail-lights swung left and disappeared. I stepped off the street and stood for a moment while my eyes adjusted to the darkness. There was no moon, and the night was hot and still. Somewhere across town a dog bayed. I could see a dark line in front of me now and I started walking toward it, putting out my hand. I touched a fence, and walked parallel to it, looking for a gate.

I should have nearly two hours before daybreak. It was plenty of time to find a way in.

I went twenty steps along the fence. Thirty. There had to be a gate somewhere. I came to a corner. There was no opening. I turned and went back, touching the fence with my hands. It was six feet high, with steel posts.

I found the gate. It rattled a little when I put my hand on it. I felt along one side for the latch and located it. I eased it open. A dry hinge squeaked in the silence. I stopped, then pulled it open very slowly.

I could see the dark bulk of the house looming ahead of me now across the expanse of rear lawn. It was enormous, two stories and an attic with high gables running off

into the big overhanging trees at each end. Off to the right was a smaller pile of blackness: the garage. The whole place was as dark and deserted and silent as if it had been vacant for twenty years.

I eased across the grass toward the back porch. Then, suddenly, I thought of something we had overlooked. If the money — or even Butler's body — were buried out here on the tremendous grounds someplace, it would take a gang of men with a bulldozer a week to search it all. We'd been stupid.

But what could we have done? Our only hope was that the stuff was in the house. If I didn't find it there, we were whipped. The only thing to do was go on.

At the rear of the house I made out the forms of two windows set close to the ground and partially screened by shrubs. They were just what I'd been hoping for: basement windows.

I slipped up to the first and took out the small flashlight. Standing close to shield it with my body, I shot the tiny beam inside. The latch where the top and bottom sashes met was closed. I moved to the other window. It was latched too.

Probably all are, I thought. Getting down on my knees, I turned the light on again and shot it in on the hook at the bottom of one screen. I took out the screwdriver, pushed in the blade through the wire, and pried at the hook. It slid out, and the screen was free. I

swung the bottom of it outward against the shrub and got in behind it.

Taking the scotch tape out of my pocket, I began peeling it off and plastering strips of it across the glass of the upper sash, criss-crossing it in all directions. Then I reversed the screwdriver and rapped with the handle right in front of the latch. The glass cracked, but the tape kept it from falling. I slid the screwdriver blade through against the latch, and pushed. It slid open.

I raised the bottom sash, swung the beam of light down inside, and dropped in. Pulling the screen back into place, I hooked it, and closed the window. I took a quick look around the basement. There was no use trying to search it now; what I had to do first was take a quick look at the whole house and size up the job — and make certain that maid wasn't around. Diana James had said she'd be gone, but it wasn't Diana James who was going to wind up behind the eight-ball if she happened to be wrong.

I started swinging the light around, looking for the stairway. I'd just spotted it, over against the far wall, when I stopped dead still and cut the light. I held my breath, listening. I could hear my heart beating in the dead, oppressive silence, and the hair along the back of my neck was still prickling. The place was making me jumpy.

What I'd thought I heard was music.

Music at four o'clock in the morning in an empty house? Nuts. I listened for another full minute and then flicked the light on again. I went up the stairs. There was a door at the top. I pushed it open quietly and went through, into the kitchen and past it, through the maid's room and into the living-room.

It was an enormous room. The woodwork was all mahogany and walnut, and dark with age. The drapes, which were drawn, looked like winecolored velvet, and the sofas and chairs were upholstered in maroon plush — the ones that weren't black leather. One whole wall was covered with books.

I stopped the light suddenly, staring at the rows of books. Then I brought it ahead, very slowly, watching. It was odd. The volumes of the encyclopaedia were all jumbled, in no order at all, and there were other books sandwiched in between them.

I began to have an odd hunch then. I got down on my hands and knees beside one of the sofas and looked at the dents in the rug where the feet rested. It had been moved recently. But that didn't mean anything. The maid had probably done it, cleaning.

Picking up one end of the sofa, I swung it away from the wall and looked at the back of it. I saw it then. It was a long slash in the cloth, made by a sharp knife or razor blade. I began snatching up the cushions. They were all slashed on

the underside. So were the ones in the chairs.

For an instant I wanted to throw the flashlight through the window. Then I settled down a little, and squatted on my heels to light a cigarette. The question was: *had he found it?* There was a chance he hadn't.

But if not, why wasn't he still here, looking for it?

Was there a chance it was just the search the police had given the place, two months ago? No. They wouldn't have cut things up that way. And somebody would have put the books back in some sort of order by this time. This had been done just recently.

But the fact that somebody else had been searching the place proved we were right. Apparently we weren't the only ones who had reason to believe Mrs. Butler had killed her husband before she could get away.

And I was here, wasn't I? And I was going to be here until Friday morning. What the hell. Go ahead and search the place. That was what I'd come for. Maybe the other people hadn't found it. I located an ashtray and crushed out the cigarette. The thought of the money was making me itchy again.

I went out through an archway at the end of the living-room. There was a short hall there, with the front door at one end and the stairs at the other. I started up the stairs.

I reached the top. I started to

turn, sweeping the flashlight beam ahead of me. Then I froze dead and snapped it off, staring down the hallway. A door was open on one side of it, and I could see a very faint glow of light spilling out into the hall. I put my other foot down silently and eased the awkward position I was in.

It was a candle. That didn't make any sense. Who'd be wandering around with a candle, with flashlights selling for forty-nine cents? But before I could even start to think about it, I became conscious of something new. It was a faint hissing noise, coming from the room.

Then, at almost the same time I guessed what it was, the music started. It had been the needle riding in the groove of a phonograph record. The music was turned down very low, and it was something longhair I didn't recognize.

I came forward and stopped just short of the door. The music went on very softly, but there was no other sound. I put my face against the doorframe and peered around it.

It was a strange sight. At first there was an odd feeling about it as if I had wandered into some kind of religious ceremony. Then I began to get it sorted out.

It was a bedroom. The candle was burning on the floor in a little silver dish, and beside it was the record-player. Phonograph records were scattered around on the rug, and in the middle of them, alongside a low couch, a girl in a long blue robe sat

on the floor and swayed gently back and forth as she listened to the music.

I saw her in profile with the candlelight softly touching her face and the cloud of dark hair which swirled around it. She was almost unbelievably beautiful, and she was drunk as a lord.

I remained outside the door, thinking coldly of Diana James. Mrs. Butler was like hell in Sanport.

4.

Had she thrown that curve deliberately, or had it been just a mixup? It was hard to tell, but maybe it had just been an accident. Mrs. Butler must have come back from Sanport unexpectedly, without her hearing about it. It made sense that way. We wanted the money. To find it, we had to search the house. So there was nothing she stood to gain by getting me to come up here to try to shake it down with Mrs. Butler in it.

Was there?

I couldn't see anything. But the next time I took anybody's word —

Well, we could kiss off any chance of finding it now. The thing I had to do was get out as fast as I could, before daylight. Once I got off the grounds I'd be all right. I could walk into town and hang around until there was a bus leaving for Sanport. And when I got there I'd tell Diana James what I thought of her and her information.

I remained standing there, sick with rage at the idea of having to give up. Somehow I had already come to consider the money mine, and now I was wild with a sense of loss, as if somebody had robbed me.

There was no danger. Not from her. She was too plastered to notice anything, or to do anything about it if she did see me. If I walked in and started talking to her she'd probably think I was another form of the jimjams. I could see the half-empty bottle, and the glass which had fallen over on its side. She wasn't a noisy drunk, or a sloppy one. It was just the opposite. The thing that tipped you off was the exaggerated dignity, and the slow, deliberate way she moved, as if she were made of eggshells.

The record ran out to the end and ground to a stop as the machine shut itself off. It was deadly silent now. She was still swaying a little, and I could see her lips moving as if she were singing to herself or praying, but no sound came out. Then, very slowly, she turned the upper part of her body a little and collapsed against the low divan beside her. Her face was pressed into the covering, the dark hair aswirl, one arm stretched out across it.

I started to turn away. It was time to get out of there. Then I stopped suddenly and swung my head around, listening. Somebody was coming up the stairs.

There was another room opening off the hall, but the door was closed.

He'd hear me open it. I slid inside instead, leaned over Mrs. Butler, and blew out the candle. I'd already seen the closet door partly open beyond her.

When the blackness closed in I kept the picture of the room in my mind long enough to turn ninety degrees to the right, touch the door of the closet, and step inside. Clothes brushing against my back smelled faintly of perfume in the hot, dead air.

A beam of light appeared in the doorway of the room and swung around the walls. It hit a mirror, and splashed, then swept on, and came to rest at last on the sprawled figure of the girl. It remained fixed, like a big eye, while whoever was holding the flashlight walked on into the room. It was so still I tried to quiet the sound of my breathing.

He was squatting down now, and seemed to be changing hands with the light. Then I saw why. Just for a second the gun passed through the beam, steadying up against her temple. The cold-blooded brutality of it drove me out of the closet without even time to think.

I was coming fast, the way they teach you to get up a head of steam in the first three strides. But I forgot the end of the divan. My legs hit it and I went the rest of the way in by air. He was under me and trying to turn, and from then on it was confused and rough. When nothing crunched, I knew he was no fly-weight himself, and as we rolled

across and demolished the record-player I could feel the tremendous surge of power in the arm about my neck. The light had gone out when it hit the floor, so we were in absolute darkness, and I didn't know what had become of the gun.

I broke it up by getting a knee into his belly and starting to move it down to where he didn't like it. He scuttled away from it and landed a big fist on the side of my face. I could feel it going all the way down to my toes and back up again like a shock wave. I shook my head, trying to clear it, and swung blindly in the dark. I missed. I heard him scrambling away. He was on his feet. He crashed into the door-frame, and then he was gone down the hall.

I sat up dizzily and dug my own flashlight out of my pocket. I snapped it on, shooting it around the floor. The gun was lying in a hash of broken phonograph records. I picked it up, checked the safety, and put it in my pocket, conscious of the heavy way I was breathing. It had been short, but it had been rugged.

Whoever he was, he was probably gone by now. I had the gun, so it wasn't likely he'd tackle me again. I could leave. Provided, of course, I didn't run into half a dozen more on the way out.

I thought of Diana James. She was cute. She just needed somebody to search this old vacant house. There was nothing to it. And if the first sucker got killed, she could always find more. Well, she was

going to get a sucker's full report when I got back to Sanport.

I stood up. Flicking on the light again, I looked at the girl.

Then I got it. If I left, she wasn't going to wake up.

That guy had come here to kill her. He would wait around until he saw me shove off. He didn't need the gun. She was asleep; he could kill her with anything. He was good when they were asleep. You could see that.

Well, what was I supposed to do? So now I was the protector of the poor? The hell with it. If I hung around until she sobered up, she'd probably have me arrested for burglary. And I could just tell the cops how it happened, couldn't I? They didn't get many laughs in their work. Housebreaker saves woman's life. Hey, Joe, come listen to this one . . .

Then a very chilling thought caught up with me. Suppose they found her in here murdered, tomorrow or the next day? Maybe nobody on earth knew that other guy was here. But there was one person *who knew damn well I was, because she'd brought me here.* And if she ever leaked I'd be in the worst jam I'd ever heard of.

Time was running out. I squatted there in the dark, thinking swiftly. I began to see it then. It was the answer to everything.

Here was where I went into business for myself.

We were all looking for that

money. And the only person who knew whether or not it was in the house was Mrs. Butler. She was the key, so she was what I wanted. If I left her here she'd be killed, but if I took her with me I'd have the exact thing I needed. Information.

And I knew just where to take her where we wouldn't be interrupted. I could sober her up, and maybe if I kept asking the right questions long enough I might find out a little about this. Of course, if she *didn't* have to do with killing Butler, I was laying myself wide open to arrest for kidnapping, but I could see the way out of that. I tried to visualize the road map in my mind. It couldn't be much over fifty miles. . . .

It collapsed on me then. Take her? How? I didn't have my car. Load her on my shoulder like a sack of oats, and walk through town with her? I cursed under my breath. I was right back where I'd started. But, wait. She had a car, didn't she? She must have come back from Sanport in it.

I'd have to leave her while I went out to the garage to look. But that joker probably wouldn't try to ease back until he was sure I was gone. I went out and down the stairs, hurrying. I unlocked the kitchen door which led onto the back porch, cut the light, and went out. It was a few seconds before I could see anything. It'd be a nice time, I thought, for the gruesome bastard to try to clobber me with an axe.

When I could make out the squat shadow of the garage off beyond the corner of the house I groped my way over to it. The big overhead door was locked. I went around to the side. There was a small door here. I tried the knob. It was unlocked. I went in and closed it. When I switched on the flashlight I was standing beside a '53 Cadillac. I poked the beam in on the dash. The keys weren't in it. All I had to do now was find them. In a house of about twenty rooms. I looked at my watch. It was four-twenty. Maybe I couldn't make it now, even if I already had the keys.

I'd never pretended to be able to think like a woman, but I knew a little about drunks. It paid off. I covered the area between the front door, where she would come in, and the kitchen, where the bottle would be, and I found the purse on a table by the dining room door. Her key case was in it.

I left it where it was and went back upstairs. I had picked her up and started out of the room when I thought of something else. Putting her down on the divan, I flashed the light around on the floor, looking for the bottle. It had been knocked over during the fight, but it was corked and none of it had spilled. It was a fifth, a little over half full. I shoved it in my coat pocket and picked her up again. She was still out, and I knew she would be for hours. As I went out through the kitchen I grabbed up the purse.

I put her on the back seat of the car and switched on the flashlight long enough to take a look at the keys. I sorted out a couple which looked promising, cut the light, and went back outside, feeling for the lock of the overhead door. The first key did the trick. I boosted the door up slowly and got back in the car. Picking out the ignition key by feel, I started the Caddy and backed it out onto the driveway. The drive was white gravel and I could see it all right, all the way out to the big gates in front. I swung out onto the street and felt my way very slowly for another hundred yards. Then I switched on the headlights and goosed the 200 horses.

Housebreaking, I thought. Auto theft. Abduction. What was next? Blackmail? Extortion? But I had it all figured now. I was still within jumping distance of solid ground in every direction, and I wasn't in much danger if I played it right. Somebody was going to come home first in that \$120,000 sweepstakes, and as of now I looked like the favorite.

We were headed south, on the highway we'd come in on. I rolled it up to 70 and tried to remember where the turnoff was. It should be somewhere around ten miles beyond that next town. I'd just have to watch for it, because I wasn't too sure, approaching it from this direction. I'd been there plenty of times, but had always come up from the south.

The headlights of a car behind us hit the rear-view mirror. I watched them for a minute. It probably didn't mean anything; there were always a few cars on the road, even at 4:30 in the morning. They continued to hang in about the same place, not gaining or falling back.

Maybe the joker'd had a car there and was trying to find out where we went. We were dipping down toward that long piece of tangent across the river bottom now. We'll see, chum, I thought. I flipped the lights on high beam and gunned it.

I flattened it out at 95 and the swamp and timber flashed past and disappeared behind us in the night with just the long sucking sound of the wind. I couldn't watch him now because I couldn't take my eyes off the road, but when we came out onto the winding grade at the other end I eased it down and looked. He'd dropped back, but only a little.

That was dumb, I thought. Suppose it was a highway cop pacing us? But it wasn't; he made no attempt to haul us down. He was just hanging there. I was still worrying about the turnoff. There was still only a slight chance he was following us, but I didn't want him to see where we left the highway.

We blasted through the little town and I began counting off the miles on the speedometer. The road was winding now, and he was out of sight most of the time. But I had to ease it, looking for the place.

We'd come nine miles. Ten. Eleven. Had I passed it?

Then we careened around a long curve and I saw the huddled dark buildings of the country store and filling station. I rode it down and made the turn, throwing gravel as we left the pavement. The county road ran straight ahead through dark walls of pine. I stepped on the brakes again and snapped off the lights as we slid to a stop. In a minute I saw his lights as he went rocketing past on the highway. I sighed with relief. It was probably some guy named Joe, in the wholesale grocery business.

I cut the lights back on and before we started up I looked at the watch. It was a little after five. We still had about 20 miles to go, and I wanted to get past the last houses on the way before daybreak. We could make it if we kept moving.

Two miles ahead I turned right and followed a county road going south through scrub pine. I knew the way all right now. I'd been up here a dozen times or more with Bill Livingston, and sometimes alone, or with a girl. It was his camp I was headed for.

We'd been friends in college. His family had left him a lot of money and five or ten thousand acres of land back in here, including the lake where the camp was and a bunch of sloughs and river bottom. He was in Europe for the summer, but I knew where he left the key to the place.

I slowed, watching for the wire gate on the left side of the road. We came to it in a few minutes, went through, and I closed it again. It was eight miles of rough private road now, up over a series of sandhills and then dropping down toward the lake. The last time I'd been in here somewhere and logging trucks were using the first three or four miles of the road. I could see the tread marks of their big tires in the ruts now. There was no way to tell whether any other cars had been in or not.

I pushed it hard. In about ten minutes we came to the fork where the logging trucks swung off to the right. I went left. As soon as we were around the next bend I stopped and got out and looked at the ruts in the headlights. There hadn't been a car through since the last time it had rained, probably weeks ago. We had it all to ourselves.

Dawn was breaking as we came down the last grade. I caught glimpses of the arm of the lake ahead, dark and oily smooth, like blued steel, with patches of mist rising here and there in the timber. It was intensely quiet, and beautiful. For a minute I wished I was only going fishing. Then I brushed it off.

We went through the meadow and crossed a wooden culvert at the edge of the trees along the lake shore. I stopped and got out. The key was hanging on a nail just inside one end of the culvert.

The cabin faced the meadow rather than the lake. It was large for a fishing or duck-hunting camp, more like a deserted old farmhouse backed up among the big trees at the lake's edge. It was still half dark back in here, and I left the lights on as I stopped by the overhang of the front porch.

The lock grated in the early morning hush. I pushed the door open and went in. Striking a match, I located one of the kerosene lamps and lit it. This was the main room, with a woodburning kitchen stove and some cupboards in the rear and a cot and some chairs and a table up front. The door on the right led into a storeroom which was cluttered with a hundred or so old beat-up duck decoys, parts of outboard motors, some oars, and a welter of fishing tackle.

The other one, on the left, was closed. I pushed it open and carried the lamp in. It was the bedroom. It held two built-in bunks, one above the other, and a double bed against the front wall. The bed was spread with an army blanket. I put the lamp down on a small table and went back out to the car.

I carried her in and put her on the bed. Her face was waxen white in the lamplight and her hair was a dark mist across the pillow. She must have been at least thirty, she was a passed-out drunk, but she was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. I stood looking down at her for a minute. The whole thing was

a lousy mess. Then I shrugged and picked up the lamp. I wasn't her mother. And it was a rough world, any way you looked at it.

I built a fire in the cookstove and went up to the spring for a couple of buckets of water. It was fully light now, and lovely, with bluish-gray smoke curling out of the stovepipe above the old shake roof and going off into the sky through the trees. I moved the car into the old shed on the far side of the house and closed the doors. Then I took an inventory of the food supply. Bill always kept it well stocked. There were a couple of boxes of canned stuff in the storeroom and some flour and miscellaneous staples in the cupboards. I opened a fresh can of coffee and put on the coffee pot.

I sat down and smoked a cigarette, listening to the crackle of the fire and realizing I felt tired after being on the run all night. Drawing a hand across my face, I felt the rasp of beard stubble, and went over to the mirror hanging on the rear wall. I looked like a thug. My eyebrows and hair are blond, but when the beard comes out it's ginger-colored and dirty.

I rooted around in the storeroom until I found somebody's duffel bag with a toilet kit in it. It held a safety razor and some blades, but no shaving soap. I used hand soap to lather up, and shaved. Then I put the shirt and tie back on. It was a little better.

The coffee had started to boil.

It smelled good. I poured a cup, and sat down to smoke another cigarette. The sun was coming up now. I thought of all that had happened since this time yesterday morning. Everything had changed.

I no longer worried about the fact that I was breaking laws as fast as they could set them up in the gallery. My only concern was that what I was doing dangerous as hell and if I was caught I was ruined. But it was not even that which caused the chill gooseflesh across my shoulders.

It was the thought of that money, more money than I could earn in a lifetime. It lay somewhere just beyond the reach of my fingers, and I could feel the fingers itching as they stretched out toward it. Mrs. Butler knew where it was.

And I had Mrs. Butler.

5.

I waited quietly until she came around. Then I went in. I told her my name was John Barton and I was an insurance investigator. I snowed her from hell to breakfast and then I told her about the man who'd attacked her. She took it all without blinking an eyelash.

Then she hit me as hard as she could across the mouth.

"What were you doing in my house?" she asked me.

It was too sudden. Even without having your mouth bounced off your teeth, it was a little hard to keep up. "I just told you —"

Her eyes, big and smoky-blue, were perfectly self-possessed now. "I know. You told me, and it wasn't a bad extension of the actual truth. So you must have been up there in my room when I was listening to the phonograph."

"You don't believe me?"

"Certainly not. But just who are you? And what's your business, besides extortion?"

I was catching up a little. "Don't throw your weight around too much," I said. "Suppose the police started wondering just why Butler's car showed up right in front of Diana James' apartment?"

"Did it?" she asked.

"You know damned well it did."

"No." She shook her head. "But it does have a certain element of poetic justice, doesn't it?"

It was odd, but I believed her. About that part of it, anyway.

"How *is* the accessible Miss James?" she asked, studying me thoughtfully through the cigarette smoke. "Still as bountiful as ever?"

"She likes you too," I said.

She smiled. "We adore each other. But I do wish she'd stop sending people up here to tear my house apart."

I remembered the slashed cushions. "So that's who —"

"You didn't think there was anything original about it, did you? I can assure you that in almost nothing connected with Miss James are you likely to be the first."

I said nothing. I was busy with a

lot of things. She knew the house had been searched before, but still she hadn't reported it to the police. That meant she couldn't, and she was in whatever it was right up to her neck. She couldn't report me either. I looked around the hunting lodge and settled back.

Her eyes were slightly mocking. "But I see you admit you had started to search the place. What changed your mind? I was asleep."

"It got a little crowded," I said. "With three of us."

"Three?"

"The other one was the man who tried to kill you —"

"Oh, we're going back to that again?"

"Listen," I said. I told her what had happened. I kept it straight, this time.

"You don't expect me to believe that?" she asked when I'd finished.

"When you go back to the house, take a look at what's left of your records and the player. We rolled on 'em. The other guy was a heavy-weight too."

"He was?" she asked. She was thinking about it. Then she shrugged it off. "I don't believe you."

"Suit yourself," I said.

Then I stopped. We had both heard it. It was a car crossing that wooden culvert at the edge of the meadow. It pulled to a stop right in front of the porch. I could hear the brakes squeak.

I shook my head and motioned for her to stay where she couldn't

be seen from the front window. I stepped out into the other room. The coat, with the gun in it, was on the back of a chair against the other wall. But as I started across I could look out the front door and see the car. There was only one person in it, a girl. I could hear the radio, crooning softly.

I went out and walked around the car to the driver's side. She smiled. She was an ash blonde with an angelic face and a cool pair of eyes, and she turned on the honey-chile like throwing a switch at Boulder Dam.

"Good moarornin'," she said. It came out slowly and kept falling on you like honey dripped out of a spoon. "It's absolutely the *silliest* thing, but I think I'm lost."

She was eight miles from a country road and twenty from the highway. And she didn't look like a bird-watcher. "What are you looking for?"

She poured another jug of it over me. "A farmhouse. It's a man named Mr. Gillespie. They told me just how to go, but you know how people tell you to go somewhere, they just get you all mixed up, it's the *silliest* thing. Actually."

Maybe I imagined it, but the patter and the eyes didn't seem to match. And the eyes were looking around.

The radio had quit crooning and was talking. I didn't pay any attention to it. Not then.

She said, "You're not Mr. Gil-

lespie, are you? You don't look a bit like him."

"No," I said. "My name's Graves. I'm on a fishing trip."

"My," she said admiringly, looking at the white shirt and the tie. "you go fishing all dressed up, don't you? My brother, when he goes fishing —"

"I just got here," I said. "A few minutes ago."

It was plausible enough. She might be looking for somebody named Gillespie. God knows, she sounded as if she could get lost. She could get lost in a telephone booth, or a double bed. But still . . .

An icicle walked slowly up my spine and sat down between my shoulder-blades. It was the radio. It was what the radio was saying.

"— *Butler* —"

"Are you fishing all alone?" Dreamboat asked.

All I had to do was stand there in the sunlight and try to hear what the radio was saying, and remember it, and listen to this pink-and-silver idiot, and answer in the right places, and at the same time try to figure out whether or not she was an idiot and what she was really up to, and keep her from noticing I was paying any attention to the radio.

"— *Mrs. Madelon Butler, 33, lovely brunette widow of the missing bank official sought since last June 8th* —"

Widow. So they'd found his body. "— *Mrs. Butler is believed to have fled in a blue 1953 Cadillac* —"

"I don't see any car," she said. "How did you get here?"

"— *in connection with the murder. Police have been alerted, and description of Mrs. Butler and license number of the car* —"

"Pickup truck," I said. "It's in the shed."

"— *since the discovery of the body late yesterday, but no trace of the missing money has been found. Police are positive, however, that the apprehension of Mrs. Butler will clear up* —"

Maybe this lost blonde wasn't lost.

"— *Malenkov* —" the radio said.

But she was going to get lost, and damned fast.

"— drink of water," she was saying. She was smiling. She wanted to come into the house and look around.

I smiled at her. "Water? Listen baby, I got bourbon."

I was leaning in the window a little. I slid her skirt up. "Thought I saw an ant on your stocking," I said. I patted a handful of bare, pink-candy thigh. "Come on in, Blondie."

The "You — !" was as cold and deadly as a rifle shot. Then she got back into character. "*Well!* I must say —"

But the only thing she could do, under the circumstances, was go. She went.

Somebody *had* followed us when we'd come out to this hunting cabin. That was clear enough, now. Maybe it was the guy who'd gotten away

from me last night. Maybe he and the girl were working together. He might be out there in the timber somewhere with his gun, or he might be still in town.

Well, there was one way to find out. That was to stand out here in the open like a goof until he got back with the gun and shot a hole in my head.

Madelon Butler had come out of the bedroom and was standing by the table, where a bottle was. She turned and watched me.

"Could you hear the radio?" I asked.

She shook her head. "Why?"

"You'd better sit down. There at the end of the table, where you can't be seen from outside. And take a drink. You're going to need it."

She sat down. "What is it now?"

"They've found your husband's body. And the police are looking for you."

She poured the drink, and smiled at me. "You do have a flair for melodrama, don't you?"

"You think I'm lying?"

"Certainly. And who was this timely courier, bringing the news? An accomplice?"

I sat down where I could see the door and across the meadow. I told her everything I figured, about the news on the car radio, about the girl and about the guy with the gun. She listened boredly until I had finished; then all she did was reach for her purse and take out a mirror

and some makeup stuff. She splashed crimson onto her mouth. In spite of myself, I watched her. She was arrogant and conceited as hell, but when you looked away from her for a moment and then looked back, you went through it all over again. You didn't believe anybody could be that beautiful.

"I'm ready to go back to town," she said, "if you are."

"Sure," I said. "If you don't believe me, and you want to go home, why don't you have me arrested?"

"And add to the burden of the taxpayers?"

"No," I said. "I'll tell you why. You can't." I leaned across the table and caught her wrist.

"Don't paw me," she said.

I reached over and took the other wrist. I slid my hands up inside the wide sleeves of her robe and held her arms above the elbows. "I want that money. And I'm going to get it. Why don't you use your head? Alone, you haven't got a chance, and the money's no good to you if you're dead. Maybe I can save you."

"Save me from what?" she asked coldly.

I shook my head and took my hands off her arms to light a cigarette. "Has your car got a radio in it?"

"Yes. Why?"

"I'll tell you the easy way to find out. In about an hour there should be some news. We'll listen to it —"

"Maybe there's some on now," she said. She picked up her purse

and, started toward the door. She had a good start before I realized what she was up to.

I jumped after her. By the time I reached the door she had run down off the porch and was standing in the open, fumbling in the purse for her keys.

"Wait!" I yelled. She paid no attention.

She swung her face around and saw the shed at the side of the house. The car had to be in there. She whirled, ran one step toward it, and then it happened.

The purse sailed out of her hands as if a hurricane had grabbed it. She stopped abruptly and stared at it as it flapped crazily and landed six feet away from her on the edge of the porch, and we both heard the deadly *whuppp!* as something slammed into the front wall of the house.

She was frozen there. I was down off the porch and running toward her before I heard the sound of the gun. Without even thinking about it I knew it was a rifle and that he was shooting from somewhere beyond the meadow, over two hundred yards away. She had started to run now. I grabbed her. It was four long strides back to the front step. I dug in, feeling my whole back draw up into one icy knot. I was a hundred yards wide, and all target.

I leaped onto the porch, stumbled, and slammed in through the open doorway, trying to keep from falling on her. And just as we hit the floor

I saw a coffee cup on the table ahead of us explode into nothing, like a soap bubble. The pieces rained onto the floor.

I rolled her over me to get us out of the doorway, and reached back with one foot to kick the door shut. He put another one through it just as it closed. A golden splinter tore off the wood on the inside.

It was silent, then. We lay on the floor with our faces only inches apart. The fright was leaving her eyes now, and I could see comprehension in them, and coldness.

"Maybe you'd like an affidavit with that," I said.

I pushed myself up from the floor. She was trying to sit up. One side of her face was covered with dust, and a trickle of blood from a splinter scratch was almost black against the pale column of her throat.

"Stay where you are," I said. I scooted over and stood up beside the window. Peering out one corner, I could see the meadow. It was completely deserted and peaceful in the sunlight. Somewhere beyond, in the dark line of timber at the foot of the hill he lay with his rifle and waited for something to move.

He probably wouldn't come any closer. Not until the night. But in the meantime nobody would go out that road.

6.

"The stupid idiot," she said. I looked around. She was standing up,

squarely in line between the front and rear windows. I dove.

I hit her just at the waist and took her down with me, turning a little to land on my shoulder. Splinters raked through my shirt. Panes in the front and rear windows blew up at the same time and glass tinkled on the floor.

"Are you crazy?" she spat at me.

She lay beside me, caught in my arms like a beautiful and enraged wildcat. I disengaged an arm, picked a silver of window-glass off the front of her robe and tossed it toward the front window. Her eyes followed it.

"Oh," she said.

"If you feel like silhouetting yourself again," I said, "tell me where that money is first. You won't need it."

"What can we do?" she asked.

I didn't answer her. Instead, I went into the bedroom, grabbed a couple of blankets off the bunks and draped them across the windows. One of them had a hole in it before I was through. When I ran out of blankets I requisitioned her robe. She wore blue, wide-sleeved lounging pajamas under it.

Then I went over and got the gun out of my coat. There was one cartridge in the clip. Two, I thought, with the one in the chamber.

I held onto it. I asked Madelon Butler, "Did you kill Butler alone, or did that guy out there help you? Is that how he got into the act?"

"I don't know anything about it."

"Which one has the money?"

"I have nothing to say."

"Who was that girl in the car?"

"Why didn't you ask her?"

"I don't think she liked me." I watched her, thinking swiftly. We were both in a hell of a jam, but I was beginning to get the glimmerings of an idea. It all depended on whether she had the money or not. And I was beginning to respect the cool and deadly intelligence behind that lovely face and growing more convinced of one thing all the time: that no matter who had killed Butler, *she* was the one who had the money. It figured that way.

I put it to her fast: "Have you got the money?"

Not fast enough. "I might have," she said coolly.

"Where is it?"

"I said I *might* have."

"It'll take more than that, honey," I said. "Let's get it on the line."

"Why?" she asked. "I'm not trying to sell anything."

"Maybe you'd better start, then. Take a look around you."

"Why?"

"You haven't got a chance. You're cold meat. As soon as it's dark I'm going to get out of here. I can get away, but you can't. Everybody's looking for you, and you'll be a dead woman with a hundred and twenty thousand dollars as soon as your friend out there moves in on you."

She stared thoughtfully. "And what is this proposition of yours?"

"The geetus, baby."

"I have it."

"You know about not trying to kid me, don't you?"

Her eyes were cold. "I said I have it."

I took another drag on the cigarette and looked at her a long time. There was no hurry. Keep the pressure on her. "Let's put it on the table," I said at last. "Alone, you're dead. We know that. If your friend doesn't get you with his rifle the police will. You might beat the chair and get off with life, but it's still a sad outlook.

"With me helping, you might have a chance. A slim one. Say one in a thousand. I'll try to get you out of here, hide you until some of the pressure is off and we can redecorate you as a blonde or a redhead, and deliver you to the West Coast or somewhere. I don't say I can do it. You can see the odds yourself. But I'll try."

She nodded slowly. "I see. And for how much."

"Make it a round number. One hundred and twenty thousand dollars." She continued to stare at me. "What?"

"You didn't think I was going to do it for nothing? Look at the risk. As soon as I start to help you I'm committing a crime. And when I lose my amateur standing it's going to be for big money."

"And what would I live on if I did get to the Coast?"

"What does anybody live on? Go to work."

"I never did any work in my life."

I shrugged. "I'm no employment counselor. Is it a deal or not?"

She thought about it for a minute. Then she said, "All right. But suppose you get the money? What guarantee do I have that you'll carry out your end of it? Just your innate sense of honor?"

"That's right. Now, where's the money?"

She smiled. "You'll have to go through at least part of your bargain before you even get it." The smile grew. "It's in three safe-deposit boxes in Sanport."

"Safe-deposit boxes!" I stared at her. "Well, how in the name of God are you going to get at it? With every cop in the state looking for you?"

"Well, naturally, they're not rented under my right name."

"Oh," I said. "And where are the keys?"

"At home."

"*In your house?*"

She nodded, her eyes a little mocking.

"But, Jesus, that means that even if we can get out of here we've still got to go right back in the lion's mouth —"

"Uh-huh," she said. "It isn't easy, is it? But that's the reason I engage such high-priced talent. It's no job for the inept. Let me know when you think of something."

There was a way out of it. There had to be. We had to have a different

car, and he had one. But he also had a rifle, and he knew how to use it.

She poured more drinks. The sun climbed higher. My shirt stuck to me. We sat in silence. And then I figured out what to do.

7

My white shirt had been changed for an old blue one I'd found in the storeroom. The gun was in my belt. I ran bent away from the cabin toward the bushes, the muscles bunched up and icy in the middle of my back. Guessing where he was and what he'd do was fine on paper, but out here in the open I could feel the cross-hairs of a telescope sight crawling all over me like long-legged spiders. It was the dead silence and the not knowing that made it bad.

I hit the bushes and crawled in a circuitous path around and behind the line of timber. He'd have to be near the edge of it to see the whole meadow.

I had to be behind him now. I stood up and wiped mud off my hands, then began slipping through the timber, circling toward the cabin. In the low ground underbrush was heavy, but ahead I could see it thinning out as I approached the timber line. I stopped and held my breath to listen. If he had seen me leave, he'd be closing in now. I waited for Madelon Butler to scream.

The grade pitched upward toward

the pines and stunted post oak. The soil was sandy here and matted in places with pine needles. My feet made no sound at all. Now and then I could see the meadow through the trees, two or three hundred yards off to my left and a little below. I went straight up toward the crest of the hill. I worked my way around until I should have been directly above him. I checked the gun in my belt, to make sure it would come free when I needed it, and looked down.

I could see nothing. He was farther down. I picked out a clump of bushes ten yards ahead and crept toward it, moving noiselessly on the sand. Crawling up beside it, I lay flat on my stomach and studied the hillside below me for five minutes. There was no sign of him.

I moved again, as far forward as I could go. If I missed him and got in front of him I was dead. I stopped and lay still. My eyes made the slow circle from right to left, stopped, and went back again.

I saw him.

I saw a shoe. It grew into a leg and then into two legs half-screened by the low-hanging branches of a dogwood twenty yards straight down the hill from where I was. I took a deep breath, feeling tight across the chest. One of us might be dead in the next minute or two. I could try to bluff him with the gun, but suppose he didn't bluff? He was desperate; he had nothing to lose.

I could still go back.

I thought of those three safe-deposit boxes in Sanport, and knew there was never any going back now. I started crawling down the hill.

Ten feet behind him I straightened on my knees, pulled the gun out of my belt, leveled it at the back of his neck, and said, "All right, Mac. Turn around. Without the gun."

His face jerked around. He started to lift the rifle before him.

"You'll never make it," I said.

His eyes were a little crazy, but he knew I was right. "Slide the bolt out," I said. "All the way. And throw it —"

I was careless. I'd been too intent on him. It was almost too late when I heard the sound behind me. I started to turn, and the club missed my head just far enough to land on my arm, numbing it out to the fingertips.

He was scrambling to his knees, trying to get the rifle swung around. I reached back with one arm and found her. I put my hand against her belly and threw her at him like a bag of laundry. She took a long step backward and crashed down on top of him and the two of them rolled across the rifle. I reached down for the gun I had dropped.

It was the blonde, but she'd turned off the southern belle. Her eyes were hot with fury as she tried to sit up. She had pine needles in her hair, and a scratch on her knee oozed blood over the ruin of a nylon stocking.

She didn't like me. And you could see the cords in her throat while she was telling me about it.

"Shut up," I said.

I walked over to them, dragged the rifle out from under her legs with my foot, and shoved it backward. I took the bolt out and threw it twenty yards down the hill. Then I swung the rest of it against a tree. The stock splintered, and broken glass trickled out the end of the 'scope.

"Where's the car?" I said.

Something had been eating him away for a long time. You could see it in the hot, crazy eyes, and in the way his hands twitched as he rubbed them across his mouth. "Who are you?" His voice was ragged. "What do you want?"

"A car," I said. "I thought I mentioned that."

There was something odd about them, and in a minute I saw what it was. They were brother and sister. He was big, and a lot younger, probably not over 21 or 22, but it was unmistakable. Maybe it was the identical silvery blondness and the well-formed bone structure of their faces. They were good-looking as hell. And full of it.

"You'll never take her out of there alive," he said. "I'll kill her. I'll kill you —"

I gestured with the gun. "On your feet."

He hesitated a moment, watching me; then he got up. She stayed there.

I caught her by the arm and hauled her up. Red fingernails slashed at my face. I brushed her hand away and shoved her. She bounced against him and he caught her to keep her from falling.

"If she won't walk," I said, "carry her."

He stared hungrily at the gun. "Where?"

"Out to the road. We're looking for a car, remember?"

She looked at him with contempt. "Are you afraid of this thug? Are you going to let her get away?"

"She hasn't got away yet."

"All right, break it up," I said. "You can yak some other time."

"What are you going to do with Mrs. Butler?" she asked.

"I'm going to adopt her. I think she's cute."

"Maybe you don't know what you're getting mixed up in. The police want her for murder. She killed her husband."

"I don't care if she killed Cock Robin," I said. "Now start walking."

They wouldn't tell me where it was. I had to find it myself. And just before we reached the crest of the ridge I did. It was pulled off in a clump of dogwood. "Who's got the keys?" I asked.

They stared at me in silent hatred.

It was obvious she didn't, because she didn't have a purse. I looked at him. "All right, Blondy. How'd you like one through the leg?" He took the keys out of his pocket.

"You drive," I said. "And Toots will sit in the middle."

We got in. He backed it out on the road. "Downhill," I said. "To the camp. And don't get any funny ideas about giving it the gun and crashing into a tree. I might walk away from it, but you wouldn't." I patted her on the leg. "Did you ever find Gillespie, honey?"

8.

We stopped in front of the cabin. I got out. "Inside," I said.

We went up on the porch. I heard Madelon Butler unlocking the door, and knew she had watched us from the window. The door opened, and the blonde went in, followed by her brother. I wasn't expecting it, and they almost pulled it off.

He jumped inside, making some kind of hoarse roaring sound in his throat, and the blonde tried to slam and bolt the door ahead of me. I got a foot into it just before it closed, and leaned on it. She shot back into the room and sat down.

He was on the floor, with Madelon Butler under him, groping wildly to get both hands on her throat. I shoved the gun in my belt and hauled him up. He wouldn't turn loose, and tried to bring her with him. I hit him. He turned his face a little, and finally let her go and looked at me as if he'd never seen me before. I hit him again and felt the pain go up my arm. I put my hand in his face and pushed, and he

stretched out alongside of the blonde on the floor. I felt of my hand. It hurt and it had blood on it, but I couldn't feel any broken bones.

Madelon Butler stood up. The dark hair was wild and her eyes were like winter smoke as she came toward me. I didn't know what she was trying to do until I felt the gun sliding out of my belt. I grabbed her wrist and shook her hand off.

"No you don't," I said. "Sit down."

She didn't seem to hear me, so I shoved her into the chair at one end of the table. The other two were getting off the floor. He was crying, and her face was white and her eyes blazed. They both looked crazy.

I pointed to the two chairs at the other end of the table. "You'd better sit down," I said. "I'm tired of wrecking my hands. From now on I use the gun."

Tears ran down his face. "I'll kill you," he said. "I'll kill you."

"Quiet," I said. I pointed at the chairs again.

They sat down.

I pulled a chair up to the table, halfway between them and Madelon Butler, and sat down myself. After all the violence it was suddenly quiet in the room. Then the blonde's voice shattered the silence.

Her hands grasped the edge of the table so tightly her fingers were white. I could see the cords standing out in her throat. Her voice wasn't much more than a whisper which sounded as if it was being pressed

out of her by a heavy weight on her chest, but some of the things she said I'd never heard before myself.

It went on and on. Madelon Butler watched her curiously, and when the blonde finally stopped for breath, she said, "You are a vulgar little gutter rat, aren't you?"

But the blonde was finished. She could only stare silently. She drew her hands across her face and shuddered, and at last she turned to me.

"Let me have the gun," she begged. "Just let me have it for five seconds. Let me kill her. I'll give it back to you. You can kill me, or turn me over to the police, but just let me have it —"

"Relax," I said. "You'll get ulcers."

"Let me have the gun."

Madelon Butler lit a cigarette and watched us through the smoke. The man sat hunched over the other end of the table, holding the edges of it with his hands and saying nothing.

"We're going to take your car and go for a little ride as soon as it's dark. If you don't mind."

"How much is she paying you?"

"Who said she was?" I asked.

"Of course she is. Why else would you do it?"

"I'm her mother."

"How much?"

"Never mind," I said. "I don't think you could meet the price."

She turned her face then and looked at the man. "Didn't you hear him, Jack? You see? The dear

sweet thing couldn't find it. She didn't even know what we were talking about —"

"Stop it!" he said.

"— not only double-crossed you then, to get it, but she's using it now to double-cross you again and get away and leave you holding the bag —"

"Shut up!"

There was no stopping her. "Why didn't you have sense enough to look? Just look? Did you trust her, or something? Didn't you know what she was? Didn't the other one teach you anything?"

His eyes were terrible. He hit her across the mouth with his open hand. She stopped, then, and it became suddenly and almost breathlessly silent in the room.

I looked at my watch. It was only a little after one. We couldn't leave here until it was dark. That meant that for at least six more hours I had to sit here and keep them sorted out and untangled and away from each other's throats. I had thought I could turn the gun over to Madelon Butler and let her watch them while I got some sleep, but that was out. They'd rush her the minute I dropped off. They were crazy enough. Or if they weren't, she'd taunt them into it with that arrogant contempt of hers.

I'd given up trying to figure it out. And there was no sense asking any questions. They were all too hell-bent on killing each other to bother with outsiders.

I was tired. It had been thirty hours since I'd had any sleep, and we had a long afternoon and another whole night ahead of us. I wondered what our chances were of getting back to Mount Temple and into that house without getting caught. In the dark, and with another car, we shouldn't be stopped on the highway, but the house was another matter. They'd be watching it.

I stood up and motioned toward the storeroom. "In there," I said.

They went by, watching me like a couple of big cats, and walked in. They sat down on some boxes. I stood in the doorway and looked at them.

"You won't get hurt if you stay in there," I said. "And when we leave here you'll be turned loose. But if you try to come back through this door or jump Butler again while we're here you've had it."

"I wouldn't count on that money too much," the blonde said.

"You wouldn't? Why?"

"You'll never get it. You haven't found out yet who you're dealing with. I don't know why I didn't think of it before, but it makes me feel a lot better."

"What does?"

"The fact that even if you get away from here it doesn't matter. One of you will kill the other before it's all over. Isn't that nice?"

"Isn't it?" I said. "Unsaddle your broom and stay awhile." I closed the door and walked back to the table.

Madelon Butler was gone. She'd gone into the bedroom and fallen asleep, I discovered.

Time dragged. The cabin was stifling.

I dozed off once, propped up in the chair. When my eyes flew open I saw the storeroom door being pulled gently back. The blonde was looking at me. "Back," I said. It shut again.

They'd be watching the house. They might catch us.

Or if we tried to run, it could be worse. They might kill us.

All right. I either wanted the money, or I didn't.

And if I wanted it, I had to have the keys.

Somehow, the sun went down.

It was dusk out across the clearing. Before I could wake her, Madelon Butler appeared in the doorway of the bedroom. "Put on your robe," I said. "It's time to go."

"Very well," she said.

I went over and opened the storeroom door. "All right," I said.

They came out. I motioned for them to go out the front door. I followed them. Madelon Butler came out, and I handed her the key. "Lock it," I said. She locked the door. I put the key in my pocket.

I nodded to the blonde and Jack. "Just stand right where you are. When we're gone you can start walking. Or you can have that

Cadillac if you know how to start it without the keys and don't mind that it's a little hot."

"I'll find you someday," Jack said. "I'll kill you."

"I'm in the book," I said. I motioned for Madelon Butler to get into the car.

I drove carefully, holding it down to 40 or 45. Just a simple accident or being stopped for a traffic violation of some kind was all it would take to ruin us. I thought of how invisible a car was in all these hundreds of others until something happened to it, or the driver did something wrong, and of how it was then in the center of the stage with all the spotlights on it.

We had thirty miles to go. It had been over twelve hours since she was supposed to have fled. They might not actually expect her to be stupid enough to come back, but they'd have at least one man covering the place as a matter of routine. Maybe there'd be more. The money still hadn't been found.

Would he be in front? In back? Inside the house itself?

We had to park the car far enough away so they wouldn't hear it or see the headlights. And still we couldn't walk around on the streets.

"Is there another street back of that one directly behind the house?" I asked.

"Yes," she said. "I'll show you where. There are no street lights

there, and it's mostly vacant lots."

"Where did they find Butler?" I asked after a while.

"I don't know."

"You don't know?" I asked unbelievably.

"That's right." She appeared completely unconcerned. "You were the one who heard the news report. Remember?"

It just didn't add up. I had to believe her. She had no reason to lie about it now. And she hadn't known that his car had been abandoned right in front of the James girl's apartment, either. An odd thought struck me then. Had she really killed him? But that was stupid. She was paying me \$120,000 to get her out of there and hide her from the police. For what — a parking ticket?

"You don't make much sense to me," I said.

"Really?" She lit a cigarette, and for an instant the flame of the match lit up the still, intensely beautiful face. "I wasn't aware I was supposed to."

"Did you kill Butler?" I asked.

"Perhaps you should read our contract again. I recall nothing in it about submitting to an inquisition."

"Have it your way. I just work here."

"An excellent appraisal of your status. Incidentally, I might say you have done very well so far, with only one or two exceptions."

"What exceptions?"

"First, you should have killed

them instead of turning them loose. They can describe you. And second, you have thrown away the only key I have to the house. It was attached to the car keys."

"We don't need a house key," I said. "We go in through one of the basement windows. And as far as their describing me, you know as well as I do that they're not going to the police. They can't."

"But has it occurred to you that they might be *captured* by the police?"

"Sure," I said. "But it's just a chance we have to take."

"Needlessly."

"All right. Needlessly. But I'm doing the job, and I'll do it my own way."

She said nothing. We came up the grade out of the river bottom.

I'd had plenty of warning about her. But I didn't realize it in time.

9.

We got out, and I gently closed the door. I was conscious of the shallow breathing and the fluttering in my stomach, the way it always was just before the opening kickoff in a football game. The night was overcast and still, the air thick with heat and the smell of dust.

I held her arm while we listened. There was no sound. "All right," I whispered. "Let's go."

In a minute or two we came out onto the street directly behind the house. There were no cars in sight.

She tugged at my arm. "This way."

We hurried along the sidewalk, across the street and to the gate. I eased it open, an inch at a time. We slipped through and stood in the dense shadow of the trees. I put my lips down next to her ear and whispered.

"Wait here. I want to see if there's a car around anywhere."

She nodded. I could see the faint blur of her face as it moved.

I slipped off across the lawn toward the dark mass of the house, cutting a little to the right to pass around the south side near the garage. Stopping beside the shrubs near the corner, I searched the driveway. It showed faintly white in the gloom. I could see no car.

Keeping on the grass to muffle any sound, I eased around the side of the house until I could see the front. There was no car here. The night was empty and silent.

I remained motionless for a minute, thinking. They might be parked out on the street, watching the drive. Or they still might have a man inside. We just had to chance it.

I started back. I came around the rear corner and past the back porch by the kitchen, moving silently on the grass. As I neared the gate I could just make her out. She was moving. She was coming slowly toward the house. I turned a little to meet her, and she disappeared. She winked off, like a light going out.

I stopped, feeling my heart pound in my throat. She had passed behind something. But there wasn't anything there. There couldn't be. Now I could see her again. She had stopped too. I strained my eyes into the night. I could see nothing at all. Then she winked off again. Something was between us, and it was moving.

There was no way to warn her. I wanted to cry out to her to run, but knew the stupidity of it. If I could see her, he could. But he didn't know I was behind him. I was tense. My mouth was dry.

I could run. I could circle them, get behind them and make it to the car.

I didn't run. I couldn't quit now. I started moving toward them, keyed up and scarcely breathing.

Then it happened. She had seen or heard him, and thought I was coming back. She whispered, "Here I am." It was like a shout.

Light burst over her face and the upper part of her body. She wasn't twelve feet away, exposed in the glare of the man's light like a floodlit statue. I was coming up behind him, pulling the gun from my pocket, when I heard her gasp. I could see him quite plainly, silhouetted against his own light. I raised the gun to swing.

"All right, Mrs. Butler," he said. "You're under ar —"

He grunted, and his arms jerked. The light fell out of his hand as he buckled back against me and then

slid to the grass. I lunged for it and snapped it off. Night closed around us again, black as the bottom of a coal mine.

I was scared as I felt for him. Maybe I'd hit him too hard. I located an arm and fumbled at his wrist, trying to feel the pulse, but my hands were shaky and numb and I couldn't tell. I put a hand on his chest. He was breathing normally. The fright began to leave me.

She whispered in the darkness, "I thought it was you."

I didn't answer. I was busy thinking. What did we do with him? We didn't have all night. He might come around at any time. Every minute we stayed here made it more dangerous. I had to do something, and fast.

I reached down, took the gun out of his holster, and threw it into the bushes. As I did so, I heard something fastened to his belt rattle. I had the answer then. Running a hand along his belt, I located the handcuffs and took them off.

"Stay where you are," I whispered to her.

Grabbing him by the shoulders, I dragged him up to a clump of bushes, pulled his hands behind him, and shackled them together around a couple of the big stems. Then I took his handkerchief out of his pocket, wadded it into his mouth, took off his tie and made it fast around his head to hold it in. He was still out. I knelt and listened to his breathing. He was all right.

I hurried back. Leaning close to her, I whispered, "We've got to get out of here fast. You won't have time to change. Just throw some clothes in a bag when we get inside." She nodded.

I led the way to the window where I'd gone in before. We wriggled in, and stood in the basement darkness, listening. There was no sound except that of our own breathing in the hot, dead air. "Where are the keys?" I whispered.

"In the kitchen."

I flicked on the small flashlight and we went up the stairs. I could see only more empty blackness when I cut the light at the top. There was dead silence. I flicked the beam again. "Where?" I whispered.

She took my hand and directed the beam. It splashed against one of the white cupboards at the end of the sink, moved slightly again, and came to rest on the end of it. I saw it then. A big ring hung from a nail driven into the wood, a ring filled with a dozen or more of the old, unmarked and useless keys which a house accumulates during its lifetime. While I stared, she lifted it down.

I held the light for her while she snapped it open, slid three of them off, and put the others back on the nail. She looked up at me with that cool, serene smile of hers, and dropped them into her handbag. I thought of a hundred and twenty thousand dollars hanging there in plain sight among a bunch of dis-

carded and useless junk. She was a smart baby.

The urge to hurry was getting to me again. There could have been two of them out there. One would miss the other, and start looking.

I grabbed her arm, and went in through the dining room. In the short hallway which led to the stairs I gave her the flashlight. "Make it as fast as you can," I said. "Throw some shoes and a dress in a bag and let's get out of here."

Minutes dragged by. At last I saw the beam of light cut through the darkness above me and turn at the head of the stairs. She was coming down. She had a small overnight bag in her hand. I grabbed it and fell in behind her, hustling her along.

We hurried back through the kitchen and down the stairs. We turned and started for the window. In another moment we'd be in the open and on our way.

I saw it out of the corner of my eye, and went prickling cold all over. In one motion I grabbed the flashlight out of her hand, shut it off and jammed it in my pocket. I put my hand over her mouth. Then I felt her turn her head and look toward the windows. She stiffened.

It was another flashlight, probing. The beam hit the first window, went through and splattered against the basement wall behind us. She moved a little and I took my hand away. The light outside dropped a little. It hit the floor not five feet away. Then it went out.

I breathed again. Pulling her by the arm, I began backing up. After two or three steps I turned and cut toward where the furnace should be. We had to get behind something. I felt the solid metal of it against my side just as the light snapped on again at the second window, the one I had broken. I pulled her quickly after me and we were behind it.

The screen was being drawn back. The window raised.

We couldn't get out. The light was swinging across the basement now, and if we tried to run he'd see us. Our only chance was to sweat it out. The light was pointed down. He dropped on the concrete floor, lost his balance and fell. The light dropped and rolled, coming to rest with its beam reflected off the whitewashed wall. I stared. I was looking at high-heeled shoes and a pair of nylon-clad legs which had never belonged to any cop in the world.

She reached for the light and I saw her face. It was Diana James.

I felt Mrs. Butler start beside me. Then, strangely, she pushed up against me, as if she were scared. I was too busy to think about it. I didn't until too late.

Diana James was straightening up, reaching for the flashlight. Then, abruptly, Madelon Butler pushed away from me and walked out into the open. I tried to grab her, but it was too late. She picked up the light and shot it right into the other woman's face.

"Really, Cynthia," she said, "I would have thought you'd have better sense than to come here yourself."

Cynthia? But there wasn't time to wonder about that. Diana James straightened in the merciless glare of the light, her eyes going bigger and bigger in terror. Her mouth tried to form something, but just opened and stayed there.

It was at exactly this same fraction of a second that I felt the lightened weight of my coat and knew why she had pressed up against me in the dark. I lunged for her.

She shot. It crashed. Before I could grab her she shot again, the sound swelling and exploding against my eardrums with almost physical pain. In all the madness of noise I saw Diana James jerk around, one hand going up to her chest, and then spill forward onto the floor like a collapsing column of children's blocks. Just as I reached Madelon Butler and got my hands on her the light tilted downward across the fallen dark head and the grotesque swirl of skirt and long legs and arms already still.

Silence rolled back and fell in on us. I could hear it roaring in my ears. I grabbed her.

"Here's your gun," she said calmly.

I threw it, and heard the clatter as it hit a wall and fell to the floor. "*Get out that window —*"

But she was gone. The flashlight snapped off and I was in total dark-

ness, alone. I started groping toward where the window should be. Maybe she was already there. Light flared behind me. I whirled. "*Turn that out —*" I lashed at her. Then I saw what she was doing. It was the ultimate madness.

It wasn't the flashlight. She had struck a match and was setting fire to the mountainous pile of old papers and magazines beside the coal bin. Before I reached her the pyre had gone too high to beat out.

"Run!" I shouted.

She went toward the window. I pounded after her. I stumbled over something. It was the small traveling case I had set down. Without knowing why, I grabbed it as I bounced to my feet and after her. I boosted her out the window and threw the bag out. Then I knelt beside Diana James. She was dead.

We ran across the black gulf of the lawn. The night was still silent, as if the peace of it had never been broken by the sound of shots. At the gate I looked back once. The basement windows were beginning to glow. In a few minutes the house would be a red mountain of flame.

10.

We drove like hell to my apartment. On the way I began thinking, fast, about the next step. Changing Madelon Butler into somebody else. I told her some of my ideas. She didn't approve, or disapprove. I parked her in the apartment, ditched

the car at International Airport and came back, and in all that time I hadn't even thought of it. When I got back it hit me all at once, and I asked her, "The keys. Where are they?"

"They're in the bag you brought out," she said calmly.

I felt suddenly weak. Then I remembered that the only reason I had picked up the bag back there in the basement in all that confusion had been the fact that I'd stumbled over it. I felt even weaker.

After a while, she requisitioned the bedroom. I slept on the couch. Madelon Butler was that kind of woman. I didn't like it, but I was going to have to live with it.

In the morning I woke and put coffee on the stove. She came in after a while. We drank coffee in silence. When I got up from the table she said, "Wouldn't you like to hear the news I heard on the radio?"

"The radio?" I jerked my head around. She couldn't have been listening to it while I was asleep. It was on a table at the end of the sofa I was sleeping on. But it wasn't. It was gone.

"I took it into the bedroom so I wouldn't wake you," she said.

"What news?"

"You're sure you'd like to hear it?"

I shook her, roughly. "*What news?*"

"That deputy sheriff you hit with the gun isn't expected to live. Now

who's hiding whom from the police?"

Somehow, I managed to keep my face expressionless, and I didn't relax the grip on her robe. I'll never know how.

"So what about it?" I said. "In the first place, he's not dead. And it doesn't change anything, anyway. You're still the one they're looking for." I tried not to think about it. — *Isn't expected to live.* Now I was a killer.

"According to the radio," she said, "They're looking for two of us."

I pushed her back in the chair. "All right. But listen. We're in this together. They get one of us, they get both. So do what I tell you, and don't give me any static. Do we understand each other?"

"Perfectly," she said.

I took a shower, and shaved. I went into the bedroom in my shorts, found a pair of flannel slacks and a sports shirt in the closet, and transferred my wallet to the slacks.

She hadn't made the bed. Well, that was all right. She was the one sleeping in it, and if she liked it that way —. Her purse was on the dresser. I opened it and took out a billfold full of fifties. There were twenty-one of them. I took the whole thing out into the living room. She was drinking a cup of coffee.

"Just so you don't decide to run away and join the Brownies," I said, "I'm taking charge of the roll."

"And leave me without a cent?"

"Relax," I said. "I'm just handling it. For expenses. And to keep you from running out on me. You'll get it back, or what's left of it, when we get to the Coast."

She shrugged, and went back to her coffee.

After a while I realized we might as well get started. I had her stand up and turn around. A little over average height — well, that was all right. There were plenty of tall women. But damn few as beautiful.

"Well, what about it?" she said.

"Keep your shirt on. Let's break it down. There are things we can change, and things we can't. We can change the color of your hair and the way you do it, but that alone isn't enough. We can't do anything about those eyes. Or the bone structure and general shape of your face.

"You can wear glasses, but that's pretty obvious. And you can splash on more makeup and widen your mouth with lipstick, but that still isn't going to do the job. We can't make you plain and drab enough to blend into the scenery, so we have to make you a different kind of dish. We'll start by bleaching your hair up three or four shades, to red, or reddish brown. We put it up in tight curls. You splash on the makeup. Pluck your eyebrows. Overpaint your mouth. Okay. Now, do you wear a girdle?"

She stared coldly. "Really —"

"I asked you a question."

"When I'm going out, and dressed —"

"All right. And now about falsies? How much of all that is yours?"

She objected a little. But we finally got it all straight. She was going to come out a dish no matter what we did, so we had to make her an entirely different kind of dish. A cheap one. Flashy. We even worked out a way she could get suntanned, lying in the living room with the blinds up. I went out to get the suntan oil and the bleach and some other stuff we'd thought of, and at the door I turned.

"What banks are those safe-deposit boxes in?"

She answered without hesitation. "The Merchant's Trust Company, the First National and the Seaboard Bank and Trust Company."

"What names did you use?"

"Mrs. James R. Hatch, Mrs. Lucille Manning and Mrs. Henry L. Carstairs." She named them off easily, but stopped abruptly at the end and sat there frowning at the floor.

"What is it?" I asked.

She glanced at me. "I beg your pardon?"

"I thought you started to say something else."

"No," she said, still frowning as if she were trying to think of something. "That was all. Those are the names."

"Okay," I said. "I'll be back in a little while."

As I went down in the elevator

I tried to figure out what was bothering me. The whole thing was easy now, wasn't it? Even if that cop died, they couldn't catch us. She was the only lead they had, and she was too well hidden. The money was there, waiting for me.

Then what was it?

It wasn't anything you could put a finger on. It was just a feeling she was a little unconcerned about giving up all that money. She didn't seem to mind.

11.

I took a bus across town to the stores, and I got my car out of the storage garage. I bought an afternoon paper and one of my worries evaporated with the headline: DEPUTY IMPROVED.

I hadn't realized how bad the pressure had been until now that it was gone. I hadn't killed any cop. The heat was off me. Even if they caught me they could only get me for rapping him on the head. Of course, there was still the matter of Diana James, but that was different somehow. I hadn't actually done that. She had. And Diana James wasn't a cop.

Doctors expected the cop to recover. He still hadn't regained consciousness.

The rest of the story was the usual rehash, another description of Madelon Butler and the car, and more speculation as to what had become of the money Butler stole. They

didn't believe she could have got out of the area; she must be holed up somewhere inside the ring. They would get her. She was too eye-arresting to escape detection anywhere. And there was the Cadillac. I thought of the Cadillac, parked at the airport, and grinned coldly.

There was still no mention of Diana James, but that was understandable. Her body was in the basement, and the whole house had burned down on top of her. It had only been last night. They wouldn't be poking around in the ruins yet. I didn't like to think about it.

I went out, and I bought the stuff we needed. Getting the bleach was a problem, but a helpful saleslady who thought I'd forgotten the name of the stuff my wife used managed to dig up something passable for me. I got the scissors for Madelon Butler's haircut. I got the suntan oil, and some dark glasses. I even got a carton of cigarettes and some bourbon.

When I finished the streets were hot and the air heavy and breathless, as if a storm were coming up. I could hear the rumble of thunder now and then above the sound of traffic. I didn't have any idea where I was going until I found myself standing on the corner outside the marble-columned entrance. It was the Seaboard Bank and Trust Company.

There was a terrible fascination about it. I stood on the corner while the traffic light changed and a river

of people flowed past and around me. It was inside there; it was safe, just waiting to be picked up. And the key was in my pocket.

Two blocks up, on the other side of the street, was the First National. I could see it from here. Left at the next corner and three blocks south, was the Merchant's Trust Company. It wouldn't take twenty minutes to cover the three of them. All she had to do was go down the stairs to the vault, sign the card, give her key to the attendant . . .

People were jostling me. Everybody was hurrying. It was raining. I ran across the street and stood under an awning.

Water splashed down in sheets. There was no chance of getting back to the car without being soaked. I looked around. The awning I was under was the marquee of a movie. I bought a ticket and went in without even looking to see what the picture was.

When I came out I still didn't know, but the rain had stopped and it was dusk. Lights glistened on shiny black pavement and tires hissed in the street.

Newsboys were calling the late editions. I bought one and opened it.

The headline exploded in my face. **YOUTH CONFESSES IN BUTLER SLAYING.**

Where now?

It was four blocks back to the car, four blocks of feeling naked and trying not to run.

What about Madelon Butler? That wasn't it. The big news was that if they had caught that blonde and her brother they had a description of me.

I took the steps three at a time and let myself into the apartment. A light was on in the living-room, but I didn't see her anywhere. I heard her splashing in the bathroom. I dropped on the sofa and spread the paper open.

"Mount Temple, Aug. 6, ANS. A startling break in the Butler case came shortly after 2 P.M. today with the police announcement that Jack D. Finley, 22, of Mount Temple, had broken under questioning and admitted implication in the two-months'-old slaying of the missing bank official whose body was discovered Tuesday afternoon.

"Finley, ashen-faced and sobbing, named Mrs. Madelon Butler, the victim's attractive widow, as the master mind behind the sordid crime . . ."

I stopped and lit a cigarette. It was about the way I'd figured. Finley was the fall guy. I went on, reading fast.

"Finley, who was taken into custody early this morning by officers investigating a tip a car answering to the description of Mrs. Butler's had been seen in the vicinity of a country road, at first maintained his innocence despite his inability to explain what he and his sister,

Charisse, 27, were doing in the area . . .

"Mrs. Butler and an unidentified male companion had taken his car at gun point and fled early the night before, he said. Police have broadcast a complete description of the stranger . . ."

Well, there it was. I dropped the paper in my lap and sat staring across the room. But they still didn't have anything but a description. The only person who knew who I was was Diana James, and she was dead.

I started to pick up the paper again. Madelon Butler came in. Glancing at the paper in my lap, she asked, "Is there anything interesting in the news?"

"You might call it interesting. Take a look." I tossed it to her.

She raised it and looked at the glaring headline. "Oh?"

"Look," I said, "they just captured your boy friend."

She shrugged. "Don't you think I might be pardoned a slight lack of concern? After all, he tried to kill me. And he wasn't my boy friend."

"He wasn't? Then how in hell did he get mixed up in it?"

"He was in love with Cynthia Cannon. Or Diana James, as you call her."

"Start from the beginning," I said. "Please. Which one of you killed Butler?"

"I did," she said.

She was utterly calm. There was

no remorse in it, or anger, or anything else. Butler was dead. She had killed him. Like that.

"Why?" I asked. "For the money?"

"No. Because I hated him. And I hated Cynthia Cannon. You don't mind if I refer to her by her right name, do you?"

I was just getting more mixed up all the time. "Then you mean the money didn't have anything to do with it? But still you've got it?"

She smiled a little coldly. "You still attach too much importance to money. I didn't say it didn't have *some* significance. I killed both of them because I hated them, and the money was one of the reasons I did hate them. You see, actually, he wasn't stealing it from the bank. He was stealing it from me."

I stared. "From you?"

"That's right. He was going to use my money to support himself and his trollop."

I shook my head. "You've lost me. I don't even know what you're talking about. You say this Finley kid was in love with Diana James, and that Butler was stealing the money from you. Are you crazy, or am I? The papers said he stole it from the bank."

She took a long drag on her cigarette. "I'll try to explain. The bank was founded by my great-grandfather. But there were several intervening generations more talented in spending money than making it. The bank has long since passed into

other hands, but at the time my father died he still owned a little over a hundred thousand dollars worth of its stock. I inherited it.

"Now, do you understand? My husband owned nothing of his own, except charm. He was vice-president of the bank by virtue of the block of bank stock we owned as community property. When he decided to leave with Cynthia Cannon he wanted to take the money with him. There was no legal way, of course; but there was another way.

"He merely stole it from the bank. And the bank, after all efforts to capture him and recover the money had failed, would only have to take over the stock to recover the loss. The search would stop. No one would lose anything, except me." She stopped. Then she smiled coldly, and went on, "And of course I didn't matter."

"Well, I'll be damned."

She nodded. "Yes," she said. "Aren't we all?"

"But," I said, "if you knew about it beforehand — and apparently you did some way — couldn't you have just called the police that afternoon and had them come out and get the money back and arrest him?"

"Perhaps," she said. "But my patience has a limit. Cynthia Cannon wasn't the first. She merely happened, with my assistance, to be the last. Before her it was Charisse Finley, who worked in the bank, and before that it was somebody else. I had borne a lot, but

when he calmly decided that I was going to support him and his paramour for the rest of their lives I just as calmly decided he was going to die."

"But," I said, "I still don't understand what that Finley kid had to do with it."

"That was a little more complex," she said. "He came very near to being a tragic figure, but ended only as a fool. He probably regards himself as having been betrayed by two women, both older than he was, but the thing which really betrayed him was that money —"

"You're not making any sense," I said.

She smiled. "Forgive me," I said. "I keep forgetting I'm talking to a man to whom there is never any motive but money.

"Cynthia Cannon," she went on, "knew Charisse Finley. How, doesn't matter. It was all perfectly innocent, at any rate. Jack Finley, however, developed this fantastic obsession for her. I don't know whether she encouraged him at first, but in any case she was nearly ten years older than he was and hardly the type to remain interested very long in being worshipped with such an adolescent passion.

"Anyway, she apparently dropped him rather thoroughly as soon as she began having an affair with my husband. He was older, you see, and she thought he had more money.

"I didn't know any of this until

the Saturday night when, my husband presumably being on another fishing trip, Jack Finley came to see me. He was nearly out of his mind. I really don't know what his idea was in telling me unless it was some absurd notion that I would speak to my husband about it and ask him to leave Cynthia alone. He was actually that wild.

"I felt sorry for him and tried to show him the stupidity of ruining his life over a casual trollop like Cynthia Cannon, but there is nothing more futile than trying to reason with someone caught up in an obsession like that. He was going to kill my husband —"

"I'm beginning to get it," I said. "You had a sucker just made to order. All you had to do was needle him a little —"

She shook her head. "No," she said, a little coldly. "I have just told you that I tried to talk him out of his idiocy. It was only when I began to see that it was he and his charming sister who were trying to needle me, as you put it —"

"You're losing me again," I said. "Back up."

She lit another cigarette, chain fashion, and crushed the stub out in the tray.

"All right," she went on. "I told you it was somewhat complex. At first it was just a rather stupid young man in the grip of an insane jealousy. It changed later, but he was the one who changed it — he and his sister.

"It was when he discovered, in the course of his spying, that Cynthia Cannon had changed her name that I started thinking. He apparently wondered about it without attaching much importance to it.

"I did, however; and I arranged a little investigation of my own. She had changed her name, all right, but I learned several other things which were even more significant. On several occasions my husband bought a considerable amount of clothing for himself, *which she took back to the apartment.*

"Then I happened to learn that he had let all his life insurance policies lapse and had borrowed all he could on them. I had a rather good idea by that time as to what they were planning.

"I began, also, to notice a change in Jack Finley. There was something just a little hollow creeping into those tragic protestations that my husband had ruined his life, and mine, and was ruining Cynthia's. He gave me the odd impression of a man who was torn by an insane jealousy, but a jealousy which was under perfect control and was waiting for something.

"The day my husband was scheduled to go away he arrived. He demanded to know if my husband had said he was going fishing again. I told him yes. He said we couldn't go on. We couldn't stand it any longer.

"He was still inciting me with this theatrical harangue when I heard

my husband coming down the stairs. I took Jack's gun from his pocket and shot him as he came through the door."

She stopped. For a moment she sat staring over my head. Her face showed no emotion whatever.

"All right," I said. "So then of course he took charge of getting rid of the body and the car?"

She nodded. "Yes. He was remarkably efficient, and calm. It was almost as if he had planned all the details beforehand."

"And what did they do when they found the money wasn't in the car? I suppose you took it before Finley arrived?"

"Of course," she said. "They both came. And of course I didn't know what they were talking about. I was sure Mr. Butler hadn't had any such sum with him."

"They threatened me with everything. But what could they do? If they actually killed me they'd never find it. And obviously they couldn't threaten me with the police because they were equally guilty. It was some what in the nature of an impasse."

"The money was buried in a flower bed until the police grew tired of searching the house and watching me. Then I brought it down here and put it in those three safe-deposit boxes."

"And so Finley was actually the one who abandoned the car in front of Diana James' apartment? She swore it was you."

She smiled faintly. "Cynthia, perhaps, wasn't the most intelligent of women, but even she should have known I'd never be guilty of such an adolescent gesture."

I sat there for a minute thinking about it. It was beautiful, any way you looked at it. She had outguessed them all.

Except me, I thought.

I grinned. I was the only one who had won. They had murdered and double-crossed each other for all that time and in the end the whole thing was three safe-deposit boxes worth forty thousand dollars apiece, and I had all three of them in my pocket.

"Baby," I said, "you're a smart cookie. Almost smart enough to win."

I went downstairs and around the corner. The morning papers were out now. I bought one.

I opened it.

MRS. BUTLER DEAD, the headline said, COMPANION SOUGHT.

13.

I stood there on the corner under a street light just holding the paper while the pieces fell all around me. It was too much. You could only get part of it at a time.

I folded the paper and put it under my arm. There were a half million other copies covering the whole state like a heavy snowfall, but I had to hide this one.

I couldn't stand there under the light. But I couldn't go back to the apartment with the paper. If she read it I was through.

I looked wildly around for the car. It was parked just ahead of me. I got in and pulled out into the traffic, having no idea where I was going.

In a minute I saw a parking place in front of a drugstore and pulled into it. There was light here. I could read the paper sitting in the car.

I didn't have to read it. I could have written it.

I read it anyway.

It was even worse.

I was right as far as I had guessed, but I hadn't guessed far enough. They had found the body of Diana James, all right. And the cop had regained consciousness at last. "Sure it was Mrs. Butler," he said. "I threw the light right in her face. Then this guy slugged me from behind—"

Of course they hadn't looked much alike. But they were of the same height and general build, the same age, they were both brunettes. There probably wasn't even any dental work to go on, if they called in her dentist. And nobody was going to.

Why should they? When the cop saw her she had to be on her way in, because nobody had gone in before. Then there had been the shots, after he was slugged.

But I had guessed all that, the

instant I saw the headlines. The thing I hadn't guessed was worse. I read the description. That blonde hell-cat had a good eye for detail. She hadn't missed a thing.

My eyes caught the last paragraph.

"There was something about his face that seemed familiar," Charisse Finley said. "I keep thinking I've seen him before. Or a picture of him."

I took a cigarette out of my pocket and lit it with shaking fingers. That added the finishing touch. Any hour, day or night, it might come back to her. And I'd never know until they knocked on the door.

Maybe I could still save it. She might not remember. It had been five years at least since the sports pages had carried a picture of me. A thousand — ten thousand — football players had marched across them since then.

I could wait it out. I had to. It would take only a few more days. They weren't even looking for her now; all we had to do was buy her some clothes and have that job on her hair patched up a little. I could give her some excuse for hurrying it. But I had to keep her from seeing a paper until she was out of the news.

I sat straight upright. *What about the radio?*

It might come over the news any minute. Why hadn't I thought of that? I hit the starter and shot out

of the parking place. On the way back to the apartment house I dropped the paper out in the street.

Maybe she had already heard it. How would I know? She wouldn't tell me. I still had those three keys and that bankroll in my pocket. She wanted those before she left. And there was another thing.

I was the only person left in the world who knew she was still alive.

One more wouldn't bother her.

She was in the bathroom when I came in. The radio was off. I went to the door and asked, "You dressed?"

She came out, her hair up in curlers. She'd cut it herself, and the shade was lighter, a rich, coppery red. "Why?"

"I just wondered if you'd heard the news."

Nothing showed in her face. She shook her head. "What was it?"

"That deputy sheriff finally came around." I struck a match with my thumbnail and lit my cigarette. "And they found Diana James."

"Oh?" she said. "Well, naturally they would, sooner or later."

I had to admire her. If it was acting, she was magnificent.

"Well, save the paper," she said carelessly. "I'll read it when I'm through here."

"Oh, damn," I said, "I left it in the lunchroom. But that's all there was."

She shrugged, and went back into the bathroom.

She'd be busy there for a few

minutes at least. This was the chance I needed. I went out in the kitchen and got a butcher knife out of the drawer. While I was at it, I counted them: two long ones, one short paring knife and an ice pick. And the scissors, I thought. Any time I didn't know where all of them were, I'd better start watching behind me.

I slipped out and picked up the radio off the table. I pulled out the plug, loosened the two screws in back on the underside, and pried up the rear of the chassis enough to get the blade of the knife in under it. I shoved and sliced, feeling wires and parts give way. Then I re-tightened the screws and plugged it back in. I put it back where it had been.

It was about ten minutes before she came out of the bath. She had a towel wrapped around her head. She lit a cigarette and stood watching me. "It's odd what a change of exterior will do," she said. "I feel like an entirely different person. As if I were somebody else, and Madelon Butler were dead."

There was no way to tell how she meant it. The only thing I knew for sure was that mind of hers was dangerous. I'd seen enough of its work. "Well, that was the general idea," I said.

If she knew, all she had to do was wait for me to go to sleep and let me have it. She would have committed the perfect crime. It could drive you crazy just thinking about it.

I was wanted by the police for killing her, but she could kill me, walk off with a hundred and twenty thousand dollars, and nobody would even look for her.

Not for Madelon Butler, because she was dead.

Not for this new woman, because she had been born here in this room and nobody else knew she existed.

It was insane. But there it was.

Did she *know*?

She had probably planned the whole thing the exact instant Diana James had dropped her flashlight there in the basement and we had seen her face as she reached to pick it up. She'd put it all together—the deputy's recognizing her, what would happen if the house burned, all of it.

Maybe she knew. Maybe she didn't. But how much waiting could I take, never knowing from one hour to the next when Charisse Finley might remember who I was?

I'd go raving mad sitting here hour after hour waiting for them to knock on the door. And all the time they'd be hammering at her. *Where did you see him? Or his picture? Think. Maybe he was in the papers. A big guy who looked like he'd slept in his face? Maybe he was a pug. Try some pictures of fighters, Joe. How about football players?*

I couldn't sit still. We had to get out. I could feel pressure boiling up inside me as if I were trying to explode. In that second, I was sure Madelon Butler knew.

What was she trying to do?

14.

Somehow a day passed, and part of another.

Through the endless hot afternoon I watched her, listening always for the sound of the elevator in the corridor. She lay on the rug in the sun with the sleeves of her pajamas rolled up, and rubbed suntan lotion on her face. After she had tanned for a while she put on the high-heeled shoes I'd bought and practiced the hip-crawling walk that was part of the new woman she was becoming. I stood it as long as I could. I went out and bought a paper without getting out of my car.

They had found Finley's car at the airport.

MYSTERY SLAYER SOUGHT
HERE.

Charisse Finley still hadn't remembered my name. They had nothing but a description. But they were closing in, driving me forever toward a smaller and smaller corner.

I began to wonder if I was near the breaking point.

No! I would beat her. I could still beat her.

Though none of it showed anywhere on the surface, I knew it had to be working on her just as it was on me. She knew the police were looking for me, and if they found me they found her. God knows what went on inside that chromium-plated soul of hers, but no human

being could go on taking that kind of pressure forever without breaking. All I had to do was keep her from getting a chance to kill me, and keep myself from going berserk and killing her.

I watched her for signs of cracking. There were none at all. She worked on her speech and mannerisms like an actress getting ready for opening night. She was sweet. And she wasn't worried about anything at all.

The rent on those safe-deposit boxes was paid up for nearly a full year, she told me.

Sometime after she had gone to bed I fell asleep. I didn't know when, or how long I slept. Then, somehow, I was lying stretched out on the sofa with that awful feeling of having been awakened by some tiny sound. I jerked my head up and looked groggily around the room, not seeing her at first. Then I did.

She was slipping silently out of the hallway from the bedroom. She had on that nylon robe, with nothing under it, and she was carrying the scissors in her hand. She took another soft step and then she saw me looking at her.

She smiled. "Oh. I'm sorry I awakened you. I was doing a little repair work on my hair, and I thought I'd slip out to the kitchen and get a drink."

I sat up. I couldn't find my voice.

Or take my eyes from the long, slender blades of those scissors.

"It's nice here, isn't it?" she said quietly.

So I thought I could make her crack? I sat still and clenched my jaws together to keep my teeth from chattering. I was shaking as if with a chill.

She opened the scissors, playing with them in her hands like a child enchanted with some new toy.

It wasn't that I was afraid of a 125-pound woman with a pair of drug-store scissors in her hand. It was that she wasn't human. She was invulnerable. She was unbeatable. Nothing could touch her.

There was a wild, crazy blackness foaming up inside me, urging me to leap and run, or to lunge for her and tear the scissors away and take her throat in my hands and see if she could be killed.

I hung poised over empty nothing. I slipped a little.

"I won't bother you any longer, if you're sleepy," she said. "I think I'll go back to bed."

She knew just how much to turn the screw each time . . .

15.

Then there was the last day. The day I asked her if it wasn't time to leave, and she said yes, and I saw my way clear at last. My way to win.

It was in the morning. A morning after a night of little sleep and

nightmares. Like all my nights . . .

She looked at her watch. "It's a quarter to eight. The banks won't open until ten. I've got to go to the beauty shop first, and buy some clothes —"

"Don't you realize we haven't got time for that?" I exploded. "Every minute of delay is dangerous —"

"Yes, I know," she said. "They're looking for you now."

I nodded. Everything was falling into place. "That's right."

"Nevertheless," she said. "I have to look like someone who might conceivably have a safe-deposit box. You might not notice. Another woman would."

In the end I gave in. I had to. As she pointed out, she'd be back by twelve. I didn't want to queer it by starting a fight now.

I gave her two hundred dollars of the bankroll. She called a cab and left.

I walked the floor. I smoked chain fashion. I listened for the elevator. This would be the time they would come, right at the end when I had it won. In the last four hours . . .

In the last three hours . . .

In the last two . . .

I'd tell her we were going right out on the highway the minute she came out of the last bank. That would ease her mind as to why I insisted on going along instead of letting her do it alone. But then, at the last minute, I'd think of some reason why we had to come back.

And once back here, Madelon Butler would be on her way to being dead. Really dead.

I went over to the desk and wrote out a short note to the police. I put it in an envelope, addressed and sealed it, and slipped it inside my jacket. I could count on a few hours before delivery, once I'd mailed it.

If you had a hundred and twenty thousand dollars in your pocket and were no longer being sought for murder, a few hours' start was enough.

When we came back to the apartment all I had to do was take all her clothes, including the ones she had on, and throw them down the garbage chute, leaving her naked. She'd still be here when the police showed up.

Of course she would scream her head off and tell them who I was, but they practically had that now. And the big heat would be off. Even if they caught me, they couldn't lean very hard. Not like murder.

At ten minutes to twelve she arrived. Somehow, I got the door open.

16.

They'd done a job on her hair. It was like polished copper rings. She was excited and happy, carrying a big hat box and two or three other bundles.

"Wait till you see me dressed up," she said. She disappeared into the bedroom and ten minutes later

came out. She walked past me into the center of the room, and turned slowly, like a model.

She was different. And she was a dish.

The big floppy picture hat was perched on the side of her head as if it had been nailed to the coppery curls. She had just a shade too much lipstick across a mouth that was just a shade too wide. The flowery summer dress was short-sleeved and it snuggled up lovingly against her high points as if it couldn't bear to be torn away. The white shoes were only straps and three-inch heels, and the nylons were ultra-sheer with elaborate clocks. She was wearing long white gloves, which showed up the tan of her arms.

"Let's get going," I said, after a second.

"You haven't shaved."

I'd forgotten that. I'd meant to, but it had slipped my mind. That was what pressure could do. "Well, the hell with it. No time."

Then I put a hand to my face, remembering. I not only hadn't shaved. I hadn't shaved for three days.

I ran into the bathroom, and I turned on the water and let it run hot and lathered up with soap and water and, painfully, shaved. When I came out she was waiting, with the overnight bag in her hand. "I'll use this to pick it up," she said. "I'm not taking the old clothes."

"All right," I said. "Let's go."

I parked on Avalon, where the Seaboard Bank and Trust and the First National were. I took out the first two keys and handed them to her. "I'll wait right here while you make both of them. When you're finished with the First National, walk back this way and stand diagonally across on the corner up there. I'll see you, pick you up and we'll head for the Merchant's Trust."

She got out, smiling, carrying the little suitcase.

I watched her. She crossed the street behind me and went up the steps into the Seaboard Bank and Trust. I waited.

She came out of the bank. As she passed the car she turned her face and smiled. One eye closed ever so slightly in a wink. I kept down.

I waited again.

Then I saw her cross the street ahead of me and stand on the corner.

I picked her up. My shirt was wet with sweat. My hands trembled. "Did you have any trouble?"

She laughed softly. "Not a bit." The light caught us. "Look."

She had the overnight bag on her lap. She unsnapped the two latches, smiling at me. She raised the lid just a couple of inches, and I looked in. I forgot everything else. It was worth it. It was worth everything I had gone through. It was beautiful. I saw twenties, fifties, hundreds in bundles, fastened in the center with paper bands. I wanted to plunge my hands into it.

She snapped the lid shut. I took

the other key out of my wallet and gave it to her. When she had put the key in her purse I reached over and took her hand. I squeezed it. She squeezed back.

"Look," I said softly, "after we've finished this last one, let's go back to the apartment. Just for a few minutes, before we start."

She gave me a sidelong glance full of all the itch in the world, and said, "Just for a few minutes . . ."

It was terrific. She had outguessed them all. And she thought she had outguessed me.

I slid into a parking place near the Merchant's Trust. She patted my hand and got out.

I turned my head and watched her. She went into the bank.

Only a few minutes more.

A cop came by on a motor tricycle, looking at meters. My whole back turned to ice. He went on, not even looking at me. I breathed again.

Minutes passed. The way minutes must pass in hell.

Then I saw her come out of the bank. She walked down the steps and diagonally across the sidewalk to the car. I could feel the sigh coming right up from the bottom of my lungs.

She saw me watching her, and smiled.

But she didn't stop.

She went right on by. The white-gloved left hand, carrying the purse down beside her thigh, made a little gesture as she went by the window. Three of the fingers waved.

Goodbye!

I lunged for the door handle. Then I stopped, the absolute horror of it beginning to break over me. I couldn't move. I was empty inside, and cold, and somewhere far back in the recesses of my mind I thought I could hear myself screaming. But there was no sound except the traffic and the shuffle of feet along the sidewalk.

She went slowly on down the street, her hips swaying.

I didn't know what I was doing. I yanked the wheel and came out of the parking place. A car behind almost hit me. The driver slammed on his brakes and leaned out to curse me. I was out in traffic, abreast of her. Everything was crazy, unreal, like another nightmare. I hit the horn. She strolled casually on. Somebody else turned and looked. I cringed. I wanted to hide.

I crawled ahead and stopped at the corner. The light was red. She stopped on the sidewalk in the crowd waiting for the light. I beeped the horn, hesitantly, timidly. It roared.

She turned her face slowly and glanced in my direction, cool and imperturbable and utterly serene. I formed words with my mouth: *please, please, please . . .* Her gaze swept on.

The light changed. She started to cross the street, then stepped back on the sidewalk and turned right, down the cross street. I lunged for the door and was out in the street.

Behind me a horn honked. Then a lot of horns, and a police whistle.

But now it all faded away, and I could see nothing except her. She continued serenely on. I started to the curb. Hands were grabbing me. I heard one of the cops yell something and the whistle blew again. A siren wailed shortly and ground to a stop somewhere behind me. Dozens of hands were grappling for me. I plowed on. Half-seen faces bobbed in front of me and I swung my fists and they disappeared, to be replaced by even more.

Something landed on my head and knocked me to my knees. She sauntered past just as we got up onto the sidewalk, swinging wide to avoid the seething whirlpool of us, and just after she had gone by she turned her face and looked around, right into mine, her eyes cool and patrician and just faintly curious. Then she went on.

I was screaming now. Somewhere above the sound of the blows and the cursing and the mad scraping of feet and the gasp of labored breath I could hear myself screaming. "*Stop her stop her Madelon Butler stop Madelon Butler — !*"

Blood was running down into my face. Just before I went down for the last time I pulled one hand across my eyes and cleared them and saw her.

She was at the corner. She went around it very slowly, walking as if she didn't have a care in the world. She disappeared. She was gone.

I'm not insane.

I don't care what they say. I'm just as sane as any of them. Madelon Butler is still alive. She's out there somewhere. She's laughing. She's free.

And she's got a hundred and twenty thousand dollars.

They could find her if they'd look and quit just shaking their heads when I try to tell them she's still alive.

They sweated me for twenty-four hours after they brought me in while I sat under a big white light and they walked around in the dark outside it asking questions, questions, one after the other, hour after hour, sometimes one man, sometimes two and sometimes three at once asking me what I had done with the money until I finally gave up trying to tell them that Madelon Butler had the money and that she was getting away and I just went to sleep sitting under a big white light on a stool.

When they finally got me a lawyer I told him so many times he began to believe me. He got the police to send some men out to the apartment so they could see for themselves she had been there. The lawyer went along and they took a photographer and a fingerprint man from the lab.

The only trouble was there wasn't anything there.

The pajamas and the robe and the slippers were gone. The boxes her

other clothes had come in were gone. There wasn't a cigarette butt with lipstick on it, or a single one of her fingerprints on the whiskey bottles or any of the glasses. There wasn't a trace of lipstick on a towel or pillow, nothing left of the bottle of bleach.

It went into the court record just that way.

There hadn't been any woman in that apartment.

I began to see it.

She couldn't have gone back after she had ditched me, because she had no key to get in. So she had done it before we came down town, while I was shaving. She had cleaned it up, and she had thrown all her clothes down the garbage chute. That was what I was going to do. She just beat me to it.

They found the letter in my coat, the one I'd never had a chance to mail. They asked me if I was hiding Madelon Butler in my apartment to keep the police from finding her, and if I'd written a letter to them telling them where she was.

I tried to explain. But the deal about the money loused it all up.

That was the reason they wouldn't go for a court order to exhume the body of Diana James for identification. The thing about the money had already convinced them I was mad.

That and a few other things.

When they took the radio to a repair man he said the only way he could see it could have got into the

mess it was in was that somebody had stabbed it with a knife. The repair man repeated it under oath.

Driven mad by guilt, they said. I had stabbed the radio because it kept talking about the woman I had killed.

And when I tried to tell them that I couldn't be suffering from any sense of guilt for killing Madelon Butler because I hadn't killed her, and not only that but if I *had* killed her I still wouldn't feel guilty about it because if I could only get my hands on her I'd gladly strangle her slowly to death right there before a whole courtroom full of people, including standing-room, and even pass out free refreshments if I had the money, it didn't help any.

They said I didn't know right from wrong.

If there's anything wrong with the idea of strangling Madelon Butler it must have escaped me the first time around.

But in the end it was the thing about the money that did it.

They were already looking at me strangely when they came back from that trip to the apartment. But when I gave them the list of the three names and the three banks and told them about that, they investigated.

They got sworn testimony from all the vault employees in all three banks. No boxes had ever been rented to Mrs. Henry L. Carstairs, Mrs. James R. Hatch or Mrs. Lucille

Manning. They had never even heard of the names.

And no woman remotely resembling the description I gave them had ever come into any of the vaults that day.

But, they said, Mrs. Madelon Butler herself, as president of the Historical Society she had founded, had a box in each of the banks for the storage of documents and family papers.

When they came back and told me that they had to call the guards.

And even now, when I think that for all that time that hundred and twenty thousand dollars was there in the bedroom of my apartment, in that little handbag or under the mattress of the bed, wherever she had hidden it, I can feel the scream or curse or laughter or whatever it is way down there inside me howling to get out.



*The men were bad enough,
always making trouble
around the railroad yard.
But Gleason hated the
women even more . . .*

BY
FRANK SELIG



Yard Bull

GLEASON stood in the hot sun, smacking his billy into a sweaty palm. He thought he had seen a figure ducking expertly among the cars lined up in the yard. He squinted past the sharp glittering of sun on the tracks.

Yes, that shadow. There she was.

He was sure it was a woman, although it wasn't easy to pick out details in the hard shadows, seeing them as he was through shimmering heat waves.

He spat in disgust. A woman. A plain bitch. No damn good.

He didn't mind the bums. That

was his job. Once in a while some boozier would get quarrelsome, or a bunch would pile on top of him. But his billy always saw him through. You just had to show them you meant business and they cleared out. He knew how it was. He'd ridden the rods himself one time.

Gleason watched the way the shadow moved, where the dame went. He sidled into the shade of a string of cars and started working around to head her off. Damn bitch! Couldn't she leave the rods for the men? Walk the streets or hang around the bars, but leave these guys alone. Especially the kids. That was the worst part of it.

He was eleven when he started on the rods. After being bounced around from one foster home to another, he had decided if he had to work it would be for himself.

At first he just hopped freights to get between towns and find jobs. When he was fourteen, he went in for bumming in a professional way. Gleason grinned, remembering how he used to hate the yard bulls before the muscles those encounters had built up had gotten him the same job.

The crunch of gravel made Gleason spin around. Yard-wise, the woman had automatically doubled and cut her own trail. He hoisted himself through a freight car and let himself down soundlessly on the other side. She would be ducking across the tracks that separated

them, coming from between the cars. He'd be ready for her.

Gleason gripped his billy with pleasure. Dames in the yard caused a lot of damage, and not to the rolling stock.

It had happened to him when he was sixteen.

He remembered, because it was his birthday and he had celebrated with a stolen bottle of beer. He was heading through the yard looking for a place to bed down until a train pulled out. It was along about sunset in the summer, with nobody in sight.

His sixteen years had been purely masculine, filled with the efforts to get enough to eat or snatch some sleep in a stolen spot. He didn't know about women, not then.

He found this car with the door partly open. He pushed it open the rest of the way and hoisted himself up.

Just then, with a hoarse cry, a soldier ran up and jumped out of the car. He hit the gravel with running feet.

"What the hell?" Gleason wondered. His eyes were getting used to the gloom inside the car. He saw a pile of packing straw in one corner. On top of the straw he saw the dame.

"He thought you were a bull, honey," she said.

She was sprawled there, her skirt up high. Her low-cut blouse was pulled down over her shoulders and he could see the round curves of light on her body. Her long, black

hair, perspiration-steamed into curls and loops, shambled over her shoulders. Her eyes were black with a hunger he did not yet recognize. Her lipstick was smeared.

Gleason took a few steps forward, "What's the matter — you hurt or something?"

Her laugh was low and rich, and she shivered on the straw. "Come here, kid."

He stared stupidly. "What for?"

She laughed again. "God, you're green. Don't you want any kicks?"

Gleason thought it was funny the way she lay there, shivering as if in pain. But her mouth was smiling, and she ran her tongue across her lip.

He didn't want to go near her. She might be sick or in a fit. She might be playing him along and then was going to roll him for the thirty-four cents in his pocket. He had spent all afternoon bumming that thirty-four cents.

But the way she looked at him drew him on. He got up to her, and she pulled him down beside her.

"When's this freight get rolling?" he asked.

"To hell with the freight, sonny," she said. "Kiss me."

He had never kissed a woman before. Now, without knowing why, he leaned over to give her a peck on the lips.

Her nails dug into the back of his neck as she pushed his head down hard and opened her mouth. She reached down with one hand, clasp-

ing his and making him touch her.

Young Gleason was numb with shock. It was a little while before he suddenly realized what her other hand was doing.

He tore away, revolted by the ugliness of something with which he had never before come in contact. He jumped out of the car, hardly hearing her cries. He ran down the gravel as the soldier had done.

A long way down the track, he found another freight car, jumped in and slammed the doors shut.

He threw himself on the floor and sobbed, not understanding. The splinters dug into his cheek, but he was free. Free from the horrible female and her thrusting tongue, her hot flesh, the ugly things she made him do. And she had *touch*ed him!

He hated her for that. The understanding that came later did not ease the hatred. Now there was one just like her, prowling around the cars, looking for young boys.

The sneaking shadow was no longer there. She hadn't come the way he expected. Then she'd be in one of the cars, waiting for a punk running away from home, waiting to initiate him, shock him, ruin him.

Gleason cautiously approached the cars. She'd be in one of three he was watching. The first was empty. The second one was half filled with lumber.

The door of the third car was closed on his side. He put an ear to

the car and could hear low-pitched arguing. She was in there with some high-school kid, sounded like.

Gleason's muscles swelled with rage and he clutched his billy in grim pleasure. The punk inside didn't know what it was all about, just as Gleason had found out the hard way. Later, the kid would thank him for coming around in time.

With a powerful thrust, Gleason pushed the door open and sprang up into the car.

The woman was too fast for him. She jumped up and pitched out of the open door on the other side. He saw her beating it out of the yard. The kid sat there on the floor, kind of stupid. Gleason turned to him.

"That filthy trash," Gleason spat. "I oughta bash her kisser."

"Gee, mister," the kid quavered. "I don't even know her. Give me a break, huh? I can get a job in the next town. I'll get off then, honest." His face was pinched with

fear, and he shrank under the shadow of Gleason's billy.

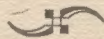
"Sure, kid," Gleason said. "It's tough at home, so you hop a freight. Then some lousy broad gets hold of you and you're done for. You know what they do, them dames?"

The kid cringed when Gleason smacked his billy into his palm. "Relax, kid. You don't know what a favor I did you."

"You gonna run me in?" the kid asked. He wasn't afraid of jail, you could tell. But he kept his eyes on the billy.

"You look like a nice young kid," Gleason said. "Okay, I'll give you a break. Nothing will happen to you," he moved closer to the boy, "if you do just like I say. Just like I tell you."

He dropped his club and held the boy with both hands, drawing him closer. His voice was an intimate murmur as he breathed into the kid's ear, "Lucky I got here before that dame ruined you."





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